

ACE IN THE HOLE, A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

# BLUE BOOK

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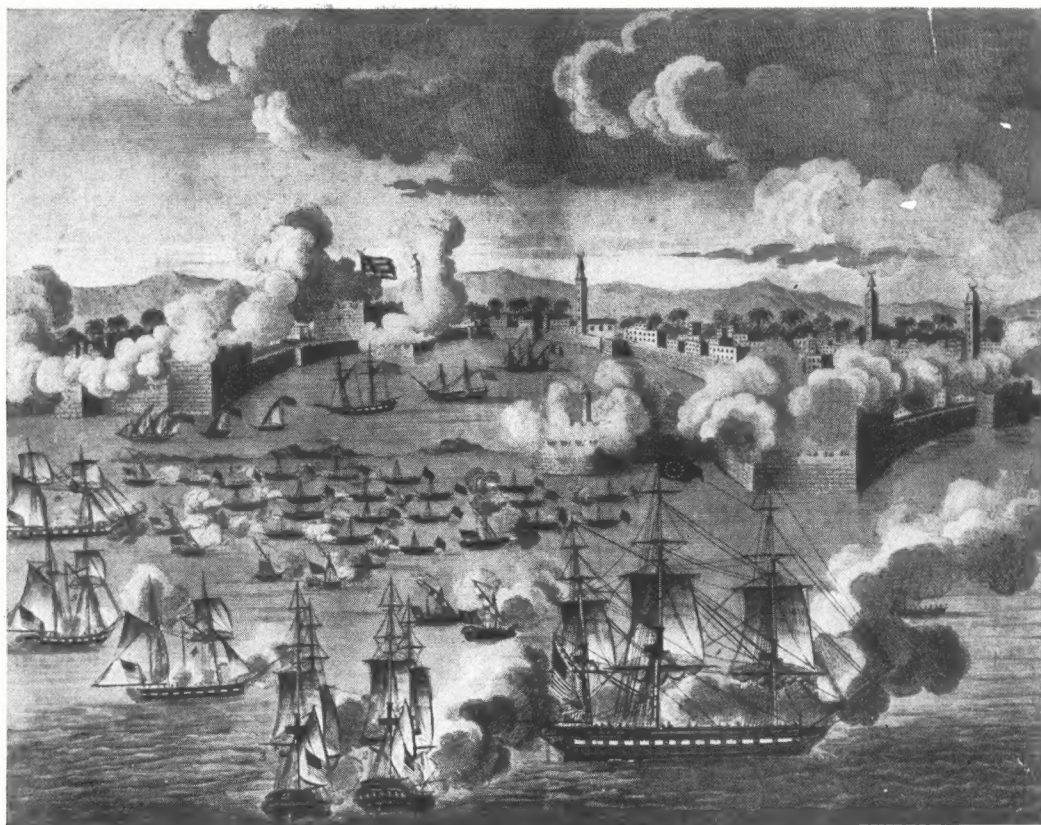


Painted by Herbert Morton Staops

A remarkable story by Fulton Grant  
who wrote "A Million for John Destiny"

BARRÉ LYNDON • JACKSON GREGORY • H. BEDFORD-JONES





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*"The attack made on Tripoli on the 3d August, 1804, by the American squadron under Commodore Edward Preble, to whom this Plate is respectfully dedicated by his Obedient Servant, John B. Guerazzi. (Leghorn 1805)*

*"(1) Constitution Frigate, (2) Sirion, (3) Arges, (4) Enterprise, (5) Notlas, (6) Vixen."*

## Our War In North Africa

The burning of the *Philadelphia* as seen from Tripoli is shown at the left in a painting by Colonel Furlong himself. When Admiral Nelson, then blockading Toulon, heard of this exploit by the men of the infant American Navy, he called it: "The most bold and daring act of the age."





# “The Most Daring Act”

*FROM our very beginning as a nation, we have had to build for wars as well as fight wars. The first ships of the United States Navy, for example, were constructed in order that we might make war against the piratical nations of North Africa. Colonel Furlong here tells the colorful story of that war—fought where British and Italians are fighting now.*

By CHARLES

WELLINGTON FURLONG, F.R.G.S.

*LAST month Colonel Furlong told of our attack on Tripoli, and of the frigate Philadelphia, which grounded on a reef in Tripoli harbor, and the capture of her three hundred men. Here he tells of the letter in “invisible” ink sent by the captive Captain Bainbridge to Commodore Preble; of the raid on the Philadelphia and her destruction by Decatur and his men; of the bomb-ship sailed into the enemy harbor by Lieutenant Somers, and its mysterious fate. Colonel Furlong tells also of his own explorations in this desert land and of his discovery of the sunken Philadelphia in Tripoli harbor.*

WE sat about a table in the garden of the Turkish Army and Navy Club, drinking *mastica* and Turkish coffee. The golden disk of the lowering, African sun was turning to red. Against it the date palms which fringed the Sahara were stenciled black. The white-burnoused city was now bathed in saffron pink, except for the purple shade of walls and of the lengthening shadows of houses and minarets. The garden occupied the space in an angle of the massive Castle walls which, on this side, were white-stuccoed and painted blue, to lessen the afternoon glare and to give at least a visual sense of coolness.

“See that spot in the wall close to the ground under that corner bastion?” a little Yorkshireman asked me, pointing toward a corner of the ancient Castle of the Bashaws of Tripoli in Barbary. The speaker was William F. Riley, Lloyd’s agent in Tripoli and consul for Norway and the Netherlands.

The “spot” was where a small hole apparently had been bricked up.

“Well,” Riley went on, “one afternoon I was passing here from the market when a ragged, unkempt fellow appeared in the caravan road there, acting most strangely. Although it was broad daylight, he groped his way about in a most uncanny manner—seemed afraid to walk erect. A crowd collected; Turkish guards soon appeared and conducted him back to the Castle from which he had come.”

“And he had escaped where the hole was bricked up?”

“Yes, the poor beggar had been in there for years in a dungeon, below ground. He’d been there so long no one even remembered who he was or for what he had been imprisoned. Emerging so suddenly from the darkness of years, the sunlight blinded him and the heavy iron shackles on his feet gave him away.”

“What happened to him?”

“Unless he is dead, perhaps the poor wretch is there now, only a few yards from us—but on the other side of the wall.”

Could the Castle speak, what tales of intrigue, romance, torture and bloodshed it could tell! But what interested me was that, within these very walls, the captured American officers and crew of the U. S. frigate *Philadelphia* had been confined. With a turn of the head, I could look out to sea to where, three and a half miles to the northeast, lay the Kaliusa Reef, upon which, on October 31, 1803, that beautiful thirty-six-gun frigate had been wrecked and surrendered to the Tripolines.

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# BLUE BOOK



MARCH 1941

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*Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.*

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Name.....Age.....

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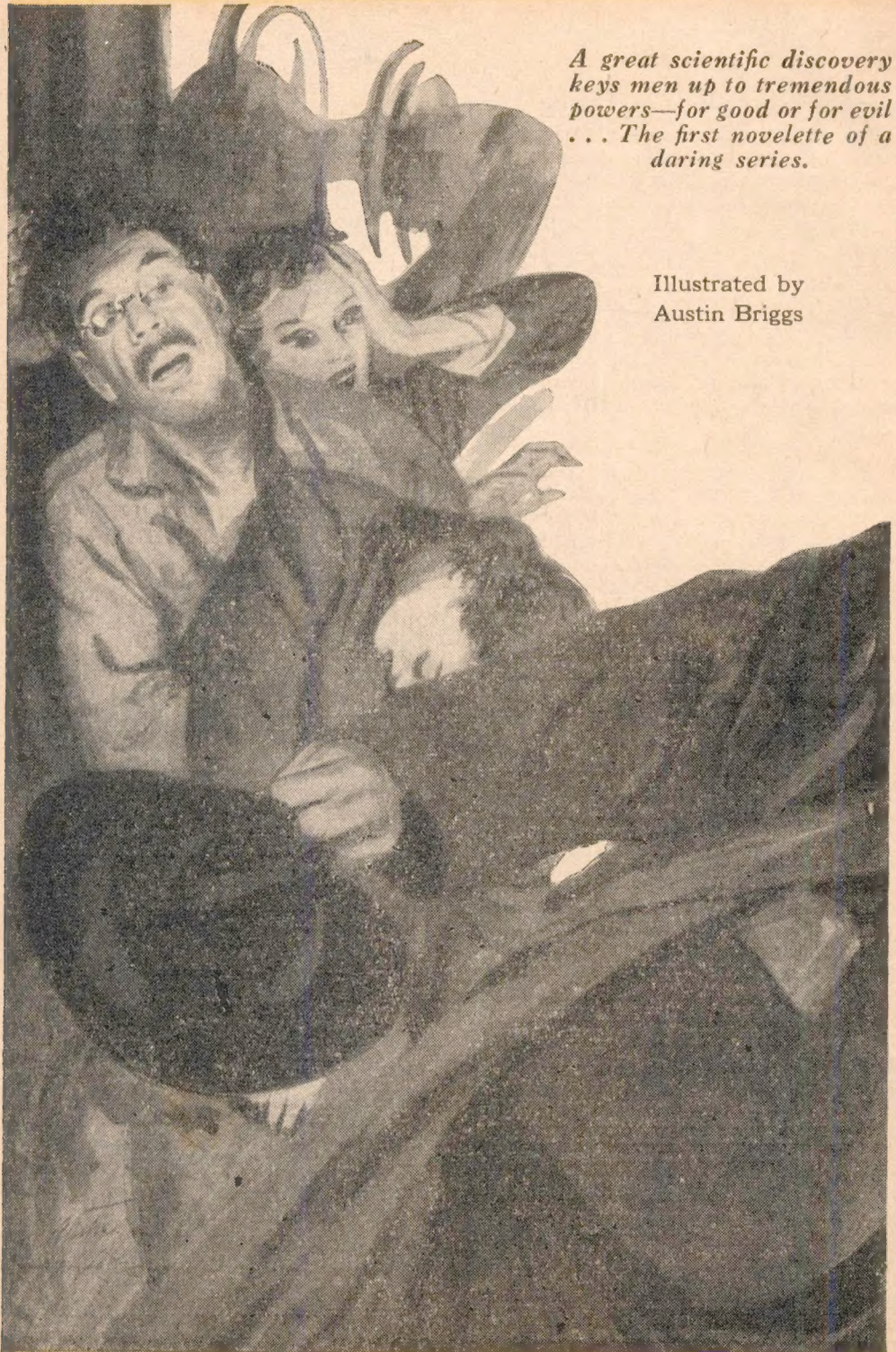
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# *The* MONSTER-

*A great scientific discovery  
keys men up to tremendous  
powers—for good or for evil  
... The first novelette of a  
daring series.*

Illustrated by  
Austin Briggs





# MAKER

By FULTON  
T. GRANT

**T**HAT harrowing sound turned out to be only the telephone ringing by his bed. He sat up, muttering curses. It was a quarter to midnight by the alarm-clock. He damned the unknown on the telephone for a callous fool. Here he was, with his first night off duty in weeks since the Grayson story, trying to catch up on sleep, and now some idiot had to ring the phone at this hour!

"Well? What you want?" His was no mood for politeness.

"I—I want—Mr. Garland. Mr. John Garland of the *Record*—" And here

the voice went off key. "Are you Mr. Garland? Are you? Oh, *please*, are you Mr. Garland?"

"Now what the—" But his language was checked by the voice. Not only was it a woman's voice, but it sounded strained, almost hysterical. "Yes, I'm Garland," he said simply. "What is it? Who wants me?"

She hesitated, but he could have sworn she breathed a "Thank God!" She was at the screaming-point, whoever she was, he sensed.

Then she answered hastily, but with a certain amount of control:



In the chair, his face distorted out of recognition, was the man who had been Cavendish.



"Bad business, Garland! You're trying to cover somebody; and you're doing it very badly."



"Never mind about me, Mr. Garland. That's not important. What's important is to hurry. Oh, please hurry—for God's sake. Don't wait an instant. It's life or death."

"Huh? What's this? What are you trying to pull? If this is a gag—"

"Oh, it isn't! Please—please believe me! You've got to hurry. You must go over to the Cavendies place—right now—this minute. Call the police first, but don't wait for them. Hurry! Don't delay a minute. It's—"

"Now, wait a minute, sister—" Of course it was a gag. Some of the boys at the office had put some girl up to it. "Suppose you pull yourself together and stop trying to—"

"Please!" It sounded like a cry from her very soul. "Please go! Get over to Mr. Cavendies' place as fast as you can. Ask for Mr. Cavendies himself. Make

them call him. Make them let you in. For God's sake, don't waste any more time—"

"Hey, listen, I'm not—" But there was a click in the wire and there remained only a mechanical buzzing in his ear. John Garland dropped the dead instrument onto its cradle and said very positively:

"Well, I'll be entirely damned!"

There was no use trying to trace a call since the new automatic system had been installed. Unless it were long-distance, and this one didn't seem to be. The Cavendies place, eh? She was crazy, this woman. Or else it was a gag. Or was it?

"Well, if it's a gag," he told himself, "they sure picked a good one. Anything that happens at B. B. Cavendies' house is a story, even if he only sneezes."

Then he decided:





"Dammit, I've got to go. I'll have a look. What can I lose? I couldn't get back to sleep now if I tried."

GARLAND'S ancient flivver rattled down the boulevard. He had an increasing sense of being ridiculous.

"If this does turn out to be a gag," he thought, "I'll never live it down. Thank God, I wasn't fool enough to call the cops."

But as he shut off his motor in front of the ivy-grown wall of the Cavendies estate, he had a vivid recollection of that unknown woman's voice.

"For my money, that dame was in a real dither," he said aloud. "I'd be a jackass to pass this chance up. If there is news in this limestone shanty, it's sure to be a scoop."

The residence of Mr. Bernard Bertram Cavendies was a landmark in Firming-

ham. They called it a castle, which it really was in replica. A spectacular thing, it was still more of an oddity in that although Mr. Cavendies, president of the Utopia Power Corporation, had never married, he had nevertheless built this huge mansion of a score of rooms and lived there in bachelor loneliness save only for his many servants.

Through the closed and bolted iron-grill gateway which shut off the drive into the Cavendies estate, Garland could see at first only utter blackness. Then he discerned a glow of some sort through the early autumn night mist, and concluded that it could be a light in some second-floor window. A smaller gate for pedestrians gave on the sidewalk, and beside it was a bell. He had almost touched the button when he discovered that the narrow grill was not fully closed. It yielded to the pressure of his hand.



That the Cavendies household was abed seemed patent. Still, there really was a single lighted window, plain enough now. Two couchant lions in stone flanked the steps like dormant phantoms in the dark. The stark formality of the white doorway made Garland hesitate.

"Imagine waking up this place after midnight," he thought. "It's damn' near sacrilege." He might have turned away even then but for the recollection of that voice saying "*—life or death.*"

FOUR or five minutes passed after he had pushed the button. Then he heard shuffling feet inside the door. Then it opened a little and a man's irate voice said:

"Who is it? What do you want here?"

"I want to see the boss," he said, concluding this must be a servant. "I've got to see Mr. Cavendies. It's important."

"Nonsense. Impossible! Mr. Cavendies receives no one at this time of night. Go away." And the door was closing in his face.

Garland's foot quickly inserted itself to check it, however, and he tried again.

"I'm from the *Record*. This is very important."

"Go away. We don't want any reporters in here. If you don't leave here at once, I shall be forced to—"

"Now, hold on, Jeeves," John said. "Don't get heated up. Is there any trouble? Anything wrong in there?"

"Certainly not. And see here, my man—"

"Then where is Mr. Cavendies?"

"Mr. Cavendies has retired. He won't like this, I promise you—"

"There's a light in a window up there."

"Possibly. He may be in his study, but he must not be disturbed at this hour. Now—"

"And your gate was unlocked, Jeeves. How come?"

"I dare say Mr. Mason forgot to snap the lock when he left; but if you do not go at once, I shall call the—"

"I'm going to see Cavendies, old son, and—"

"Impossible. Go away before I—"

"I've got a ten-spot that says it could be worked by a smart man named Jeeves."

The pressure of the door relaxed perceptibly against John's foot, but the voice only said:

"My name is not Jeeves, sir. It is Makepeace. And I should not think of disturbing Mr. Cavendies—"

"Twenty-five bucks, then—"

The pressure relaxed altogether. "I should lose my situation, sir."

"There are other jobs, Makepeace. The *Record* could get you one, easy. You go and tell Cavendies it's life or death—tell him anything, so long as I get in, and I'll hand you some nice green bills fresh out of the bank. That's easy money, Makepeace."

A sigh passed through the dark crack in the doorway.

"I don't like it at all, sir. Not at all. But if I had five dollars in my hand—"

John lighted a match, inspected the contents of his wallet, produced a green bill marked *Five*. He thrust it through the door illumined by his match. It vanished. Someone shuffled away inside, gloomily muttering.

Minutes passed like hours. Twenty-five dollars out of any reporter's pocket is important money. It would have to be a hot story before he could put that on the expense account! Also, a bare word from the president of the power company could put him on the street looking for a job in some city where they had no local dictator like Cavendies, however benevolent. He was, he decided, a plain damfool.

THEN suddenly there was a sound. It came from within. In the misty darkness, it was a dismal sound of someone shouting—in fear or in excitement or terror. A light went on inside. There was shuffle and bustle and the noise of running feet.

The feet came running to the door, which was flung wide open. The man who stood there mouthing, gasping, panting, wore a jacket hurriedly put on over his pajamas. He was crying out at John Garland:

"My God, sir! Oh, my God, sir, he's dead. . . . Mr. Cavendies is dead. He's been killed, sir. Oh, my God—"

John Garland brushed past the pajama-clad man and plunged into the huge foyer inside. There were people in there, all running, all in a fantastic hurry. There were more people dashing up the stairs, and sounds from up there told John where to go.

An hysterical group stood staring through an open door on the second floor, all in sundry night attire and all half paralyzed with shock and fright. They would be more of the servants, Garland thought as he ran upstairs and down the hall. A woman who might have been a



housemaid had collapsed onto the floor just by that doorway. John managed to avoid stepping on her as he forced himself through the huddle. So great was their emotion that they did not perceive anything out of the ordinary in the presence of a stranger dashing through the household in that fashion.

The room inside that door was a study. The walls were continuous bookshelves. A desk stood at the center, with a green-shade lamp lighted on it. And in the desk-chair, his head sagging sickeningly back, face distorted out of recognition, his limp body dressed in a luxurious dressing-gown of velvet, was the man who had been Bernard Bertram Cavendies. He was dead.

Professional instinct produced John's next actions.

"Did any of you call the cops?" he cried at the cluster of servants. No one made a reply, but there was a general buzz of negation. John seized the telephone from the dead man's desk, dialed a number which he knew full well, waited—it seemed endlessly—for the response. Then it came.

"Hello, Headquarters. I want Lovelle—Sergeant Lovelle. No, wait. I'm Garland of the *Record*. I'm at the Cavendies place. . . . That's right, *Cavendies*. The castle. B. B. Cavendies is dead. It's a job for Homicide. It looks like a strangling—"

Then he had an afterthought.

"Hello? Listen, I'm using the phone on his desk right now. Had to do it. Maybe I left prints on it. Tell Lovelle that. I don't want any trouble when he gets here. Tell him I'll hold this place down for him until he gets somebody up here. That's all. Remember it's Garland." And he hung up.

He was conscious of the amazed stare of the servants.

"Okay," he shouted at them, his own emotion high. "Get back, all of you. Better get dressed, too. Don't touch anything, hear? And nobody goes out. Your boss has been murdered, and the cops are on their way."

SERGEANT MARTIN LOVELLE of Homicide had tinged his manner with a certain respect for the able young reporter of the *Record*, but he was none the less skeptical.

"Now, hold on, Mr. Garland," he said. "Maybe I didn't get what you said right. What I get is that you was asleep and some dame rings you on the phone and

says you gotta hurry and get up to this joint right away. She says it's life and death."

"That," confirmed John, "is just about it. Screwy, I know, but it was just like that."

Being who he was and what he was, Lovelle looked rather than spoke his opinion of that, for he was the oldest and also the toughest member of the Firmingham police department.

For some years now there had been a casual friendliness between John Garland and Martin Lovelle. They had worked on a number of cases together.

The reaction of Mr. District Attorney Boyd, however, was somewhat different.

"You don't," said Mr. Boyd, "expect me to swallow a yarn like that, Garland?"

"No," said John, "I don't. But it's a fact, just the same."

Mr. Russell Boyd's face, customarily grave and bleak, became graver, bleaker.

"Bad business, Garland," he commented. "Dangerous business. You're trying to cover somebody or something. And you're doing it very badly."

John Garland flushed a little.

"Meaning you think I'm a liar?"

"If you prefer to put it brutally, yes."

"Do you want it under oath?"

"I ask no man to commit perjury, Garland."

ANGER was mounting fast in the reporter. He spoke with heat:

"Listen, D.A., I can't make you believe anything you don't want to. I told you what happened. I got here at twelve-fifteen, and you can check that by this man Makepeace. I didn't know a damn' thing about this murder until I heard Makepeace yelling upstairs, and all hell popping inside here. Any or all of the servants will testify that I ran up the stairs as soon as I got in, and I found Cavendies—well, I found him the way he is. The first thing I did was to put a call in for Lovelle. Now, who the hell would I be trying to cover? Or do you think maybe I strangled Cavendies myself?"

Mr. Boyd considered the matter, and presently he said:

"If I thought that, Garland, it would simplify matters. I think you're a smart reporter—a little too smart for my liking and for your own good. The law is equipped with adequate measures for those who obstruct justice, Garland. Bluntly, I don't believe a word of any



Quickly John slipped out of the unguarded door and dashed for the stairs.



such story as you have so brazenly told us. Just as bluntly, I think you are either covering some person whom you yourself suspect of being involved in this murder—shall we say for gallant or sentimental reasons, the person being a woman—or else you're concealing evidence in order to build a better newspaper story."

The enormity of it overcame John's surge of anger. He merely laughed in the District Attorney's face. That gentleman, however, ignored the rudeness and went on:

"Now, I'll give you until tomorrow afternoon at two, Garland. I want you here then for the Coroner's inquest. And if I find you're withholding something, I shall hold you as a material witness. I may even charge you with obstruction. Let me make this very plain: two o'clock tomorrow, your last chance. And if, in the meantime, the *Record's* story discloses anything that you have withheld here—I shall know what steps to take. Is this clear, Garland? If it is, that's all. We don't need you here any longer tonight."

It was clear. It was devilishly clear. And as John drove his asthmatic flivver through the park once more, nosing through the Willow Street entrance as a shortcut to the *Record* office, he was conscious of two motorcycles following

his car at a distance of a hundred yards or so. They would be policemen.

IT was nine o'clock in the morning. Mr. J. Selzer Hurd, owner and publisher of the *Record*, was in his office. He was already tired. He was worn and laboring under shock and emotional strain. Like every other good citizen of Firmingham that morning, Mr. Hurd was the victim of a powerful sense of bereavement. The death—and by murder, too—of Mr. Cavendies could produce no lesser emotion than that.

John Garland entered his employer's office. "You wanted to see me, Chief?"

"Yes. Sit down, John. This is a terrible thing—terrible. An incredible, terrible thing. You have done a good job of reporting. Excellent. But—"

"Yes sir?"

"I have just had a call from the District Attorney's office. Mr. Boyd seems to think—"

"I know. He thinks I'm holding something out on him."

"Are you?"

"No. Nothing." Garland went over the story of that telephone-call again. The publisher frowned.

"And you have no idea—no explanation?"

"Nothing very good. It could be a lot of things. It could be the murderer who





called me—some woman in Cavendies' life."

Mr. Hurd shook his head.

"I doubt that—not Mr. Cavendies. Of all persons in this city he has less likelihood of—likelihood of—ah—"

"Being involved in a scandal? A female skeleton in his closet? No, Mr. Hurd. I don't go for that myself, Cavendies had been too damn' busy since he became a municipal god, making money and getting famous, to get himself mixed up with women. Besides, he didn't like 'em much. Never married. Nobody ever saw him with a woman—"

"Well?"

"Well, people do call the newspapers. Crackpots. Nuts. Hysterical dames. People who want to turn a dollar or so for a tip on a story."

"But how would this woman know your name, John?"

"You've got me there. Still, I'm in the phone book. Also I've had plenty of by-lines on this paper, Chief. Folks have seen my name."

Mr. Hurd nodded, though plainly he was not satisfied.

"All that does not explain how she—"

"How she would know there was a murder going to happen? No, it doesn't. She said 'life or death.' Sounds as though she wasn't sure which. Didn't know Cavendies was dead when she phoned."

"It puts you and the *Record* in a very bad light with the District Attorney's office, John," said Mr. Hurd. "Have you any more thoughts?"

"None worth anything. I'm pretty tired and my thinker isn't ticking regularly. Still—"

"Yes?"

"I'm not sure that the business of that woman matters. What sticks in my crop is this name Mason. Cavendies' man Makepeace said a Mr. Mason left that gate open when he left. There is only one 'Mr. Mason' who would be at Cavendies' shanty. Besides, it's no secret—the other servants admitted he was there."

"You mean Dillworth Mason?"

"Who else? He went to Cooper Law College with Cavendies and he's always been closer to the utility-man than any other person in town. Besides, he lives almost next door—only a block away."

"BUT—great God, a lawyer like Mason—"

"Would be too smart to kill Cavendies, even if he had the urge? Probably would. He'd be too smart to do it in any way that would let anybody suspect him, anyhow. What I'm getting at is that his being there sets a time—an interval. When I told Lovelle about Mason's being there, he went into action. Called the Mason place on the phone."



Hilda Mason—Mrs. Mason—came to the phone. Naturally, he didn't mention a murder—just asked if Mason was in. She said he was in bed. Said he had been over at Cavendies' place all evening—had dinner there. Said the two of them had been working on some scheme or other—she didn't know what, exactly. Anyhow it checks with the stuff they found on B.B.'s desk—papers, manuscript, figures—looks like a bill for the State Legislature or some lobby material."

"But I fail to see—"

"Wait. Mason had been working over there every night this week. Sometimes Hilda went with him, but not tonight. The little Jap house-boy testified he had served them dinner on Cavendies' desk."

"Proving what?"

"It clears Mason, and it sets a time. Because Taichi was clearing up for the night at around eleven. He removed the dishes at ten, but he was washing them in a second-floor scullery when Mason left. Said he saw Mason standing at the study door talking to Cavendies and saying good-night. One of the housemaids heard them, too. Well, what I'm getting at is that Cavendies wasn't dead then, was he? Must have been alive, to be saying good-night."

"But according to your report in the paper, death must have occurred at—"

"I know. The medical examiner placed it at *two* hours before he saw the body. Still, it was a preliminary examination; and besides nobody can be so specific about death—except maybe in detective stories."

"But the girl who telephoned—"

"Even that doesn't matter. She knew something, but she didn't know he was dead when she phoned. . . . It doesn't add up, Chief. It beats me entirely."

It apparently beat Mr. Hurd also, for he sat for some minutes without speaking; then:

"There is no doubt about the strangling?"

"No. Why?"

"See here, John: Mr. Cavendies was an unusually strong man. That is known. I doubt if there are ten men in Firmingham who could have strangled him without a drawn-out fight. And you say there was no sign of struggle?"

"You've got something there, Chief. Remember the field-day for the Utopia employees last year? Well, I covered it for the paper. Cavendies came down to referee some of the track events. Al-

ways the democrat, you know. And I saw him take a sixteen-pound shot from one of the hunky grease-monkeys from over at the plant, and toss it for nearly a world's record. And at that, he was half kidding. Strong? I don't believe even Man-mountain Dean could have strangled Cavendies without getting himself a flock of scars. Whoever did it must have walked in behind him before he knew what was up. And he wore gloves, too—no fingerprints around, except Cavendies' and Mason's, and mine on the phone. I tell you it's a phony, Chief. It couldn't happen."

"You must locate that woman, John."

"Sure—oh, sure! There's a hundred thousand dames in this town, and all I know about her is a voice. Not much of that, either. So I'm going looking for lady needles in this city haystack."

"She might call again."

"If she only wanted to get cash for a story, she might; but I don't like that angle. That dame was having herself a nice case of hysterics. She was scared, chief. She didn't *want* that murder to happen. And now it did happen, so what more would she want of me? She tried her trick, and it flopped."

They both remained silent after that, until John stretched wearily and said:

"I've got a date with Boyd at two o'clock, and I need some shut-eye—unless you've got more for me right now—"

But the telephone on Mr. Hurd's desk rang sharply. As the publisher picked up his instrument, he spoke to Garland.

"Get your sleep; you'll need it," he said. But before John reached the door—

"This call is for you, John," said Mr. Hurd. "It seems to be a lady. I should say that she is a little upset."

IT was the same voice; no doubt about that. "Mr. Garland?"

"Yes."

There was a quick intaking of breath; then:

"I had to call you again, Mr. Garland—because—" That note of strain was still in her voice. "Because there is something else—something terrible—"

John was tired, irritable, exasperated.

"Now, hold on," he said. "I want to know who you are, and how-come you always call me when you've got—"

"Please, Mr. Garland! I can't tell you that. I'm no one you know or ever heard of. Besides, it doesn't matter. What matters now is that you must go to Mr. Mason—Mr. Dillworth Mason—"



## THE MONSTER-MAKER

John's mood had no liking for mystery. "Would you be trying to tip me off to another murder?" he demanded brutally.

The voice approached hysteria again.

"Please! Oh, please!" He heard an undertone that sounded like, "*Oh, the fool, the fool!*" but she went on:

"Oh, please, don't you understand? Can't you see I'm trying to *stop* these awful things? Please believe me! And please go to Mr. Mason at once, and—"

"Don't tell me the rest; let me guess. Hurry over and call the cops, only don't wait for the cops. I know—"

"No," said the voice more soberly. "The police will not be necessary now. But hurry, Mr. Garland. Don't wait. You may get there in time to stop him."

Then there came a click of finality in John's ear, and the line went dead.

Mr. Hurd had listened to half of this conversation, and when John turned, his face was a study in amazement. He could only whisper:

"Good God, John! Good God!"

But Garland was already in motion.

"I'm on my way, Chief," he said over his shoulder. "Maybe you'd better phone the D.A.'s office—just in case I can't make it to the inquest this afternoon. Tell him what you just heard, and maybe he'll—"

But the sentence remained incomplete, for Garland was already out of the door and down the hall. . . .

When, that morning, the newsboys had hawked the *Record's* extra, crying the death of Mr. Cavendies in the streets, it was news to shock the citizens of Firmingham into a paralysis of emotion.

For Bernard Bertram Cavendies, newly made president of the Utopia Power Corporation, was the city's leading citizen, the people's Great Man.

Put it in John Garland's own words. ". . . . I can't believe it yet, Mr. Hurd. I simply can't picture this town without a B. B. Cavendies sitting in his office on top of the Power Building and telling people here what's good for 'em. It's like everybody's father getting snuffed out. . . ."

That was a fair statement of a truth, made early that morning before this second telephone-call, before the name of Dillworth Mason, long associated with that of Mr. Cavendies in life, became joined with it in death.

The history of those two men is amazing. Until 1929, when the notorious Medlow trial stunned Firmingham, neither name had been heard publicly.

Emil Medlow, a Hungarian doctor, was charged with illegally experimenting on a year-old baby and thereby causing the little one's death. He was revealed as a quack, a charlatan, a pseudo-scientist. He was tried in one of the most moving cases in the history of local court annals. And he was defended by a young lawyer, Dillworth Mason.

That trial brought Mason from obscurity into prominence. One of Medlow's own patients, he fairly hypnotized a jury, softened a hard-bitten judge, and secured a verdict of manslaughter where one of murder had been demanded, obtaining a commensurate lightness of sentence. And among the witnesses called was another young lawyer and patient of Medlow's, Bernard B. Cavendies, whose eloquently given testimony had virtually saved the guilty doctor.

THOSE two names, once before the public, remained there. Mason pursued his career as a criminal lawyer and he revealed such genius that the entire community wondered how it came about that he had not distinguished himself long before, since he had already lived in Firmingham for a number of years. He went from triumph to triumph.

Cavendies also grew rapidly from that year, although differently. Also a lawyer, he had lived on a small retainer from the Utopia utility corporation, among many other minor counselors thus retained for routine matters. He exploded into prominence when a government bill aimed at the company threatened to deprive the city's greatest industry of the right to operate the big hydroelectric plant at Miniver Dam as a private enterprise.

Single-handed, Mr. Cavendies defeated this bill. He concocted and sponsored, thrust upon the directors and personally executed a plan whereby every subscriber to the power service became a shareholder in the company. Thus the "public utility" became such in fact as well as name, and the very point of the threatening bill was nullified. Overnight, Cavendies became an idol.

He rode this achievement. He was nominated and elected city comptroller by a landslide vote. In this office his financial wizardry baffled all opposition. Then he became in rapid succession, commissioner of budgets, counselor-general, vice-mayor and finally mayor of Firmingham. In a few short years he rebuilt, replenished and reorganized Firmingham



until the stamp of his personality was written upon every block in the city's pavement, upon every cubic foot of concrete, upon every citizen's soul.

And while it is true that Mr. Cavendies amassed a great personal fortune, no man had ever doubted his personal integrity.

Then, when old John D. Sarkas died in office, the presidency of Utopia was offered to Mr. Cavendies. He accepted it and resigned from all public offices. From his tower office in the Power Building, by methods indirect though effective,

he ruled and guided—or dictated—the destinies of Firmingham. Despite his position, he remained a "people's man."

There was no one like Mr. Cavendies in Firmingham nor in the State—unless it were his close friend, Mr. Dillworth Mason. The two were supermen in the public mind.

And now Mr. Cavendies was dead and that mysterious voice on the telephone warned of something ominous which hovered over the Mason home. . . .

John Garland's flivver nosed down the boulevard, over Willow Street, through the park and toward the home of Mr. Mason.

"Well," John reasoned as he drove, "one thing is clear now, anyhow. Nobody can tie in Mason to the death of poor Cavendies. A good thing the D.A. didn't insist on routing him out of bed last night. Or," he mused, "is it?"

The residence of Dillworth Mason, while no castle, was scarcely less of a landmark in Firmingham than that of Mr. Cavendies. A road from the park wound through the estate, entering at an old-fashioned gate beside which stood an equally old-fashioned lodge. Today, the gate was open. John Garland was mildly surprised.

His astonishment doubled, however, when he arrived at the inner yard. Two black coupés were parked close to the house and each bore the insignia of the Firmingham police. Not only that but a uniformed officer stood at the doorway and firmly denied John entrance.

"The press, is it?" said the officer, "Ye'll wait here until the D.A. comes



"Good God!" he muttered. "What's wrong here? What happened?"



## THE MONSTER-MAKER

and lets yez in, then! Sure, it's no matter for the press until he says so."

"Now, listen here, flattie: I don't know what's up in there, but I'm entitled to find out. I came here to see Mr. Mason, and by God I'll see him—"

"Not any more in this world, yez won't," stated the policeman. "And ye'll be careful who yez call flattie before I run yez in for disrespec'! And so yez didn't know that Mason just took a notion a bit ago to blow his brains out with a gun?"

John Garland gasped.

"God!" he exclaimed. "Good God Almighty!"

Bad news travels fast. Only ten minutes after John's arrival at the Mason residence a dozen other cars roared into the yard in the wake of Mr. District Attorney Boyd's famous green roadster. Boyd frowned at the sight of John Garland.

"You get around, Garland," he said. "This wouldn't be another one of your telephone tips, eh?"

To this irony John did not reply. It seemed futile. The D.A. gave his orders.

"Well, this time you'll wait until we're through—you and all the other press people. I don't run a sideshow for the newspapers and I don't want you underfoot."

And so the score or more reporters, camera-men and sundry representatives of Firmingham's three papers and two news agencies were herded into a downstairs living-room, there to await the pleasure of District Attorney Boyd.

**R**ESENTMENT and anxiety filled John Garland. This was not what he had come for. This was not getting a story. Somewhere under all this was a meaning, a positive something. He must get at it—he must not stay herded in here with the others!

The lower living-room into which the press had been gathered was large but not large enough for the comfortable handling of so many persons. At the end of the room a crowd was storming the guard, protesting at this high-handed treatment. It made for confusion. It gave John Garland his inspiration and his opportunity.

To remove his coat attracted no attention in that sweltering room. Still less when he opened a rear window and leaned out of it as though to breathe fresh air. And he was able, screened by the thick smoke and covered by the confusion, to thrust his coat outside, to light

a match and set fire to the cloth, holding it until the flame and smoke were considerable. Then he laid it upon the concrete sill where it might do no more damage than to pour smoke into the room inside.

Drifting back to the other end, where the crowd milled around the policeman, he interrupted:

"Say, Officer, what's all that smoke back there? I'd hate like hell to be caught in this room in a fire—"

It worked. The officer cried, "Holy Mother!" and dashed for the window. The crowd followed him, leaving John alone. Quickly he slipped out of the unguarded door and dashed for the stairs.

**T**WO more policemen patrolled the upper hall. John waited for them to pass, flattening himself in an angle of the wall, until they had gone down in the direction from which a buzz of voices came, implying that the D.A. and his men were at work in the room of tragedy. Then, without any plan but with a frantic urge to get into action, John Garland took the hall's other direction. He saw a door part-way open, darted inside the room beyond on tiptoes, and closed the door. He found himself in a fine library, the walls lined with continuous bookcases, the pungent odor of burning logs perfuming it, and the sound of a crackling fire pleasantly audible.

And then, as he actually saw the fireplace, he nearly cried out in astonishment and dismay. He was not alone in the room.

The other occupant, however, had apparently not heard John come in, and did not see him. She was kneeling at the fireplace, intent upon burning a piece of paper. Also, he remarked, she was crying.

This was a house of tragedy. Reporter or not, he could not willingly thrust himself upon a woman in the moment of her grief. And so he backed toward the door, very quietly.

But then she saw him. She had turned her head, and was about to get up from the fire. She gave a little cry of surprise and fright.

"Oh—"

John's confusion and discomfort was intensified by the consciousness of his attire. Bad enough to stumble upon this young woman at all, but to be in shirt-sleeves!

She was on her feet now and facing him squarely. Quite young, evidently;



very attractive, too, and surprisingly self-possessed under the circumstances. For she said, with authority:

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"I'm sorry," said John,—and meant it,—"if I—er—frightened you. I'm only a reporter. I—"

Evidently that was not a good word to use.

"A reporter! I thought Mr. Boyd agreed to keep the reporters down—"

"He did," said John. "And they're all still down there, I guess. Only, I sort of—got away from the others. I had no—"

"You had no right!" Indignation was speaking. "You had no right to come up here. This is a—a private house, and there has been a terrible—tragedy. It's—it's plain ghoulish. It's—"

JOHN felt keenly the injustice of her words—and the justice, as well. It was true enough, from her viewpoint, that he had no business up there, but—

The "but" was something else again. As the girl stood there confronting him in her wrath, the sound of her voice, the rhythm of it, recalled another voice, another kind of emotion. It grew specific as she talked. It was impossible, incredible—but he *knew that voice!*

Because as surely as this attractive young woman stood there berating him, accusing him of callous indiscretion, upbraiding him for ghouliness—this same woman was the girl whose voice had twice called him in the telephone, warning him of—death.

"Now just one little minute—" he began, but he never did finish, for sounds and circumstances prevented.

The sounds, at first, were the opening and closing of doors. They came from the rear of the library, suggesting that this door gave upon a rear or private hallway. More sounds were half-stifled sobs, sounds of emotion and spiritual agony, and finally a shrill, broken voice:

"Phyllis! Phyllis! Phyl-lis! Where are you?"

The girl broke off her anathema of the press to call back:

"Here, Mrs. Mason—coming."

And she ran back and through that rear door, leaving it open in her haste, so that John could not fail to hear the next words of the still unseen Mrs. Mason.

They were tragic words. But to John Garland they were stupefying words, revealing words:

"Oh, Phyllis, did you hear what they said? It isn't true, it's a lie, oh, it's awful! They said Dill killed him—they said he murdered Bernard! They accused him of murder, Phyllis—*murder!* I can't stand it, I can't, I—"

And the door closed suddenly as the woman's voice rose to the pitch of hysteria. The strange Miss Phyllis, John knew, had slammed it shut.

The thing baffled John Garland. Dillworth Mason had murdered his oldest friend, Bernard Cavendies? *They* had accused him. Who were "They?" What fantastic business was afoot?

But before he could complete speculation in his puzzled mind the door behind him opened and another voice said, commandingly:

"Garland!"

It was the voice of Mr. District Attorney Boyd. And at the sound of it John Garland was frozen where he stood.

"I had an idea you might be in here," said Mr. Boyd, and there was ill-concealed anger in his voice. "I concede the smartness of your coat-burning trick, but I warn you that it is a little too smart. Take care you don't lose your shirt along with your coat."

He completed the warning: "And just to make it emphatic that I do not tolerate your brand of journalism, Garland, I am ruling the *Record* out of this case."

That was a death-sentence. John protested:

"Hold on, D.A.; you can't do that! After all, I only—"

"I can, and I am doing it, Garland. I am well aware that it may cost you your job. I shall not shed tears if it does."

"Now, listen—"

"*You* listen! You're leaving here now. You are going back to town under escort, and you can thank a certain restrained tolerance on my part that I do not say 'under arrest.' That's all. —Take him away, boys."

The "boys" appeared from behind. "Come along, now. Yez heard the D.A., didn't yez?" said one of them. "Do yez come easy, or do we get tough?"

John came "easy."

FOLLOWS here a partial reprint from the Mason story as carried on the evening of September 18 by the *Firmingham Dispatch*. A similar story also appeared in the *Post*, but it is noteworthy that only a headline and a brief, unin-



## THE MONSTER-MAKER

formative bulletin was visible in the city's largest newspaper, the *Record*:

DOUBLE TRAGEDY SHOCKS CITY, STUNS NATION: SUICIDE OF DILLWORTH MASON FOLLOWS DEATH OF HIS LIFELONG FRIEND BERNARD CAVENDIES

Today is the blackest in Firmingham's history. The dread lightning of death struck twice in this city in rapid succession. As the morning extras revealed the incredible and tragic murder of Firmingham's leading citizen, Bernard Bertram Cavendies, the utility man's closest friend, Dillworth Mason, noted lawyer, took his own life at his home on the edge of Phelps Park.

An obstinate secrecy surrounds the findings of the investigating police, and only the barest facts have thus far been given out. Yet it is apparent that Mr. Mason took his life from the double motive of grief, shock at his friend's demise, and also because of the aggression of some dread disease which he knew to be preying upon him and from which, he knew, there was no escape.

It has been shown that Mr. Mason himself was the last person, save only the murderer, to see Mr. Cavendies alive. The two had spent the evening in the Cavendies mansion, dining together and working upon a bill to be offered to the State legislature. Investigation shows that they had worked thus until about eleven o'clock at night, when Mr. Mason, returning home, informed his wife that the two entertained high hopes for the bill's passage at the coming session. Mr. Mason slept late this morning and was awakened by Mrs. Mason, bringing the shocking news of his friend's death. The lawyer's secretary, Phyllis Gainsway, confirmed the statements of Mrs. Mason and the servants to the effect that Mr. Mason was powerfully shaken by this sad news, that he remained in his room all morning, refusing breakfast, apparently brooding and writing the tragic note which he left behind him.

"All illusion, now, is gone," he wrote. "And in such moments of lucid sanity as still remain, I cannot contemplate the continuation of life without the association of this man whom I loved, admired and respected as a friend and inspiration."

Again the tragic document says, "For many months I have entertained hope of rising above this terrible force from which I may not escape, which places such a barrier between other men and myself.

*Cavendies, my friend, and one of the only two living persons who shared my secret, is dead. How, then, can I allow myself to go on, an inhuman thing, apart from this world? How can I allow the burden of my own sin to be carried by those whom I love, when already it is too great for me?"*

This portion of the note is taken as a reference to the ravages of some disease, mental or physical or both, at the outcome of which lies madness.

"Well, that's the way it is, sir," John Garland was saying. "I've made a flop of it, the biggest story we ever handled. I've made a fool of myself and a laughing-stock of your paper, and so if you're going to fire me, get on with it. I can take it."

MR. HURD smiled wearily. "I have," he said, "no intention of letting you go. To the contrary, I may need you now more than ever, John."

The reporter looked up.

"Meaning what?" he demanded.

"Meaning that I have a strong intuition about this case—and a stronger one about you, John."

"About me?"

"Yes. I have never before known you to accept defeat in handling a story. Your behavior now is—ah—somewhat abnormal. I am convinced that there are elements which, for one reason or another, you have not given me, John."

"Huh? And what makes you—"

"Not only that: I have just had a lengthy talk with Mr. Boyd, who telephoned just now. It was patent that he wanted me to discharge you. I refused him pointedly. I am in the habit of backing up the men who work for me, John. And I was struck by the District Attorney's manner. I found him too—ah—too anxious. I feel that he suspects you may have stumbled upon material which he, for some reason, prefers to withhold from the public. Or that you might do so."

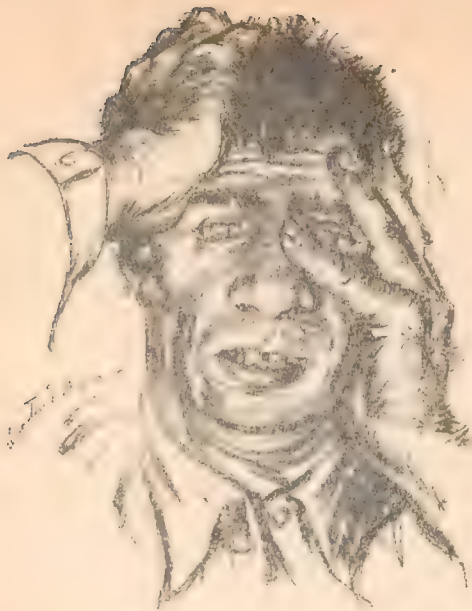
"I don't see why—"

"Also I have been studying the story of Mr. Mason's suicide as reported by our illustrious competitors. I find it dramatic to a degree, but actually thin, inconclusive. Briefly, I don't believe it. I feel sure that the D.A. has held back a great deal."

John said, boyishly: "Wow!"

"I do not, for instance," Mr. Hurd went on, "believe that Dillworth Mason





"I didn't mean no wrong!"

was touched with insanity. I had the pleasure of talking with him at the Metropole Club only last week. He was far from insane, I assure you."

"But—"

"I also find it incongruous that any man would kill himself because a close friend was murdered, even if that friend was sharing the knowledge of a creeping disease or insanity. And there is another point right here: the suicide note says Cavendies was 'one of the only two living persons' who shared that knowledge. This has been interpreted to mean that Mason himself was the other. I doubt that interpretation. I am sure it is wrong. There remains, therefore, another person not known who shares it—whatever the knowledge may be—"

"Hold on, Chief—"

"Wait. Fourthly, there is a remarkable coincidence in the bare fact of a violent death—a murder without known motive, and a suicide without sufficient motive—both occurring to two intimates who happen to be this city's most remarkable men."

"What are you getting at, Chief?"

"Nothing definite—yet. I am trying to discover what it is that you have in the back of your head, John. What are you holding back?"

John Garland lighted his pipe, stood up, paced the floor. Finally he said:

"I'm not really holding out on you, Chief—only—"

"Only?"

"Only I've got hold of something that is so—so damned fantastic it isn't real.

I don't believe it myself. And now I—Hell, we can't print it! What's the use?"

"Let me judge that. What is it?"

John puffed his pipe in silence, then spoke his staggering inference.

"I have some reason to believe, Chief, that Dillworth Mason murdered Cavendies himself."

The idea visibly rocked the publisher.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "It's impossible—"

"Maybe. It's pretty screwy, anyhow, but—" He rose again, knocked out his pipe and again began pacing the floor.

"Listen, Chief," he said.

And John told in detail the interview with the girl called Phyllis and the subsequent hysterical remarks of Mrs. Mason. The publisher was impressed.

"It's—it's amazing. It's unreal, John. I can't believe it."

"Neither could I. That's why I waited to see if the D.A. was giving it out to the press. He didn't, obviously. But that isn't quite all, Chief."

"Not all? In heaven's name—"

"That Phyllis woman—Gainsway, I guess her name is, from the other papers—she's the dame that telephoned me twice—"

"Great God!"

"Yes she is, and that isn't quite all either. We've met her before—I have, anyhow. Remember the Medlow trial?"

"Medlow? You mean that charlatan doctor who killed a baby while experimenting? Naturally! Why?"

"That's where we saw her—she testified for Medlow. She was called by Mason. I dug up her picture in our photo morgue, so I know I'm right."

"But still I—"

"Wait! Remember that trial? It was Mason who defended Medlow—got him off with manslaughter instead of murder. And it was Mason who called her, also called Cavendies, as a witness for Medlow. That was a long time ago, but I remember it. And now this dame turns up as Mason's own secretary, besides which she telephones me to warn us about Cavendies' death. Try and untangle that one, Chief."

MR. HURD pondered; then he said: "It is a curious set of coincidences, but it could be simply explained. What you say is true—Mason did try Medlow. He did call Cavendies as a witness—they both were Medlow's patients. And it may be that he also called this Gainsway girl. But what was she then?"



"She worked for Medlow: an assistant, a nurse—one of those people that doctors have."

"It still seems not—ah, unusual—that Mason might employ a young woman who had lost her job when Medlow was imprisoned, especially if Mason knew her."

"That's true enough, only—only— Remember, I told you she was burning something in the fireplace when I came into the library? I'd like to know what."

"But see here, my boy, a murder requires a motive. If Mason killed Cavendies, then we have two baffling questions: When did he do it—and why? And if Boyd knew it, why didn't he give it to the papers?"

"You've got me there—about *when*, I mean. As to *why*, there is only one possible answer that isn't very good. I dug up more stuff in the photo morgue. We had a picture of Hilda Mason when she was Hilda Fellowes, before she married. It's a picture of her at the races and she's standing with Bernard Cavendies. I just wonder if—"

"You mean—something between them? You mean *jealousy* for a motive? Good Lord, John—Bernard Cavendies, of all men! I cannot conceive of there being a woman in the case, least of all his friend's wife."

He paused, reflected, then went on:

"Nor do I see any possible association between Cavendies and the criminal Dr. Medlow. Believe me, John, the man's life has been under the closest scrutiny! It's clean. Bernard Cavendies was to be nominated for Governor at the next election, John. His name has been under study for some time. Remember, I am chairman of the local Republican Club; and my information is accurate."

"The hell," said John, "you say! Well, he'll hardly get it now."

Mr. Hurd was not in a mood for banter.

"If you actually did overhear Mrs. Mason," he went on, "imply that some person was suggesting her husband had killed his friend, then the implication is to be investigated, however incredible it may seem. Now about this Gainsway girl: if she really is the one who telephoned you, then you must—"

"Sure, I will; I haven't forgotten her! I had an idea I might run out there and speak a little piece in plain language this afternoon, only—well, the D.A. seems to want me to be at the Cavendies inquest."

"That won't be necessary now."

"No? Why not?"

"I mentioned it to Mr. Boyd. I—ah—took that little matter into my own hands. I shall represent the *Record* myself at the inquest, John."

"You?"

"Why not? It is a matter of straight reporting. In the meantime, I suggest you go home and get some sleep. I can see that you are tired."

"That," said John, "is your understatement for the day. I'm dead!"

"Then go home and get a nap. I may want to talk with you later on. And if you find a way to see this Miss Gainsway—"

"O. K., Chief. I'll figure it out. And—Mr. Hurd— Well, that is—thanks, Chief! There isn't a newspaper-owner in captivity who would have taken my word for what happened this morning—and who wouldn't have fired me! 'Thanks' is all I can say."

"Good afternoon, John," said the imperturbable Mr. Hurd.

THREE things happened in quick succession later that day. John's alarm clock rang at five-thirty precisely; he awoke grudgingly; there came a soft, tentative knocking at the door to his room, then a slight bumping sound in the hall. Thereafter there was no sound at all.

His head began to clear. Cold water on his face completed the revival. He got on trousers and slippers, then donned a dressing-robe and peered out into the hall. A night-light's pale beam showed no knocker, no person, merely nothing.

"Hallucinations, I guess. Dreams," he said. "Too many things happen too fast recently. It's getting me down."

But just as he closed the door, a sound came to him from out there in the hall, and it was the kind of a sound that made him fling open the door again and step out to investigate.

The sound was a groan. . . .

He saw her lying there just to the right of his door, where the little hallway bent. It was only a faint gleam of the light on some decorative bauble of the woman's hat that he saw, but it was enough.

"Good God!" he muttered and knelt down by the supine body. "Hev, what's wrong here? What happened?"

Even as he spoke, he knew she could not hear him, for when his hand went under her head, there was the sticky feel of blood.

Garland was not a man to think or ponder long before acting. He lifted the



woman up and carried her into his room, a dead weight, limp, sagging. And when he had laid her out on his bed where the light fell on her face, he exclaimed again: "God Almighty!"

For the woman was this same Phyllis Gainsway, secretary to the late attorney Dillworth Mason.

COLD water on a cloth had a quick effect, however; presently the girl's eyes were blinking. They were rather nice eyes, John noticed.

"Mr. Garland?" she whispered. "Mr. John Garland—"

"Feel better?" he said inadequately. "Take it easy. Somebody conked you. I've been conked myself; I know how it feels. I wouldn't try to move much."

But hurt or not, she was being strong about it. She made a great effort to sit erect, and with the help of John's arm, she succeeded. Then she said again:

"Mr. Garland? You are Mr. Garland?"

"Sure I am. And I know your name too, Miss Gainsway, but I admit the rest of you has me puzzled. Especially seeing you here has me puzzled, not to mention getting yourself conked on the head right in front of my door. But I can wait. —Want me to fix you a drink?"

But Miss Gainsway was recovering rapidly.

"Thank you, no. I'll be all right. I must tell you—it can't—can't wait—"

"Seems like you've always got something on your mind that can't wait, Miss Gainsway. For instance, when you call people up and tell them to hurry up and catch a murder or a suicide—"

Her eyes widened, and John said:

"Sure, I know who you are. You've got the kind of a voice you can't disguise very well. I caught on when we—when I saw you at Mason's. So don't play games with me, Miss Gainsway. I'd swear in court that you're the lady who telephoned me; and my boss, Mr. Hurd, would back me up because he heard you too. So let's call that fact established. And if you think you're equal to a little explanation—"

What she said to that, surprised John. Disregarding his accusations, she said:

"I read the papers. You didn't report—you didn't print what—what you must have overheard Mrs. Mason say to me."

"No," said Garland, "I didn't. I'm a newspaper man—a ghoul to you, maybe, but still a fair-to-middling reporter—with some ideals of my profession, too. We don't report what we can't prove. And

since the D.A. didn't give out any dope that would indicate that your late boss strangled his friend, I thought I'd wait until—maybe until I had an interview with you. Looks as if you know a lot more than anybody else about those two deaths, Miss Gainsway."

She did not flinch at that. She said: "I do. Oh, I do, Mr. Garland! Believe me, I do."

"It isn't hard to believe, under the circumstances. May I expect you to share a little of it with me?"

"I—I came here to tell you. That's why they—"

"Why they conked you? And who is 'they'?"

Now she puzzled him again. "I'm not sure—I don't really know who did it. I only know why. You see— Oh, I've been such a fool!"

"Now please, Miss Gainsway: Suppose you start right from the beginning and tell me why you made those phone-calls and then why you came here. And while you're at it, you might tell me what you were burning in Mason's library fireplace when I busted in."

She sat down. She was very pale, but she spoke bravely, clearly.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I must tell you all of it. But please—oh please, Mr. Garland, don't give it to your paper. Don't let it out—not yet. It's too big. It's too—too terrible and too important. And I'm not sure I understand all of it myself. That Mr.—the District Attorney almost made me tell him, but I 'didn't. I don't want anything to happen that— Oh, dear, I'm so confused—"

"That," said John, "makes it even. Suppose you start telling me. I promise you that if it isn't a complete story, we won't print it. The *Record* is a pretty sound sheet."

And so Miss Gainsway began her tale.

"DO you remember that awful business of Dr. Medlow?"

"You mean that old quack who—"

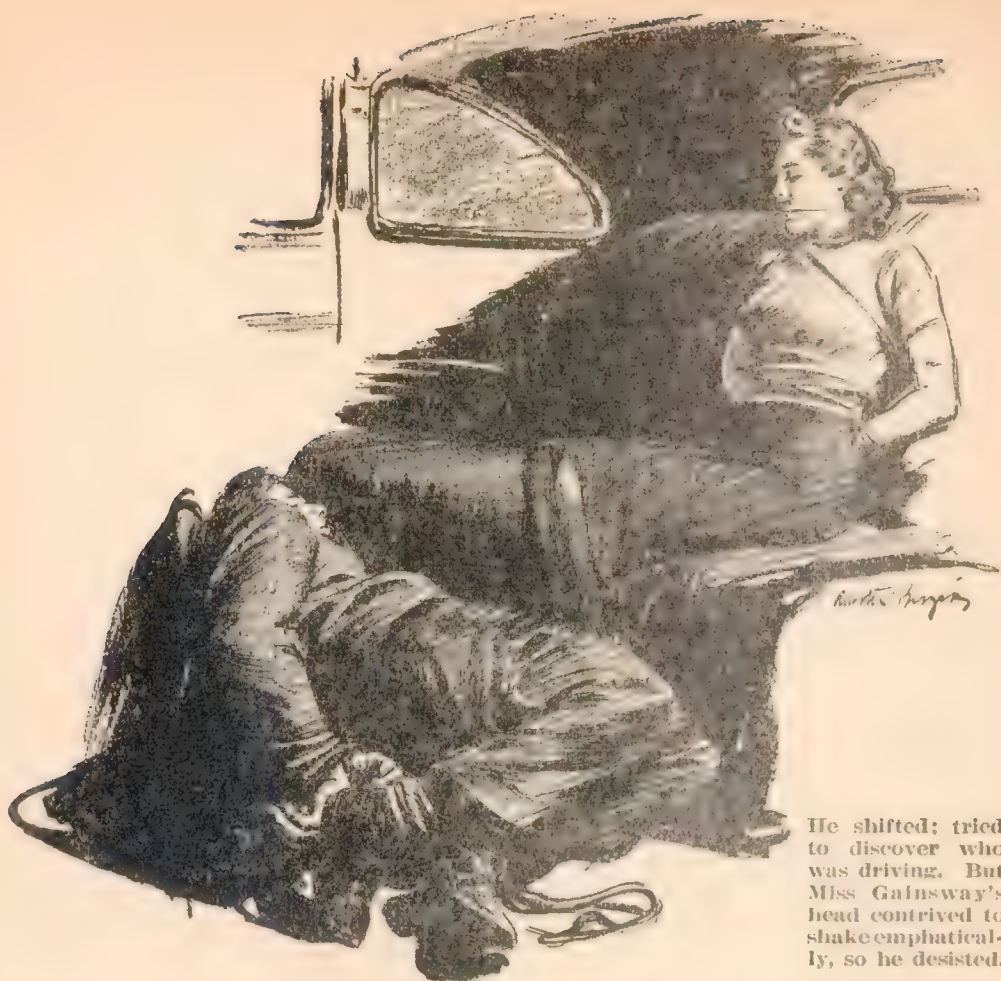
"He wasn't a quack," she protested.

"He was a great man, a very great man. I worked for him, and I testified—"

"I know that," admitted John, and told her of his discovery in the records of his newspaper. "And I admire loyalty when I see it, Miss Gainsway. Just the same, any man who would use a year-old baby to experiment on, when he can get a brace of guinea pigs—"

"He *didn't* experiment! Oh, can't anybody see that?"





He shifted; tried to discover who was driving. But Miss Gainsway's head contrived to shake emphatically, so he desisted.

"A jury of twelve honest citizens couldn't, I seem to remember, even if Dillworth Mason did hypnotize the court into calling that operation manslaughter instead of murder."

"But that baby was a subnormal, a *cretin*! Do you know what that means? It's terrible. Their brain doesn't develop, and they're helpless all through life and—oh, it's frightful!"

"It sounds unpleasant, but—"

"He had to operate—*had* to, to save that poor baby. It was a last resort. It wasn't an experiment. He had done it hundreds of times—on animals—monkeys, goats, guinea pigs. It was a lot better for the baby to die than to grow up the way it would have. And it wasn't Dr. Medlow's fault. Lots of operations fail but they don't hold the surgeons for murder. But somebody got hold of the baby's mother and told her she could make some money if she—"

"Wait a minute, Miss Gainsway," John broke in. "This is all very interesting about Medlow, and I appreciate your honesty and your loyalty to him, but

I thought we were talking about the deaths of Bernard Cavendies and Dillworth Mason?"

And then the girl said surprisingly: "I have been trying, in my own way, to tell you, Mr. Garland, that Dr. Medlow is responsible for the deaths of those two men."

That simple statement rocked John back upon his mental heels.

"You see," said Miss Gainsway, "why this is too big to be published until all of it is known?"

"I don't," admitted John Garland, "see anything at all, right now. You better go ahead and talk. Right now I'm in a tail-spin."

"Dr. Medlow," said the girl, "wasn't a quack or a charlatan at all. He was the most advanced scientist of his age, far ahead of his time. He worked miracles. He did things that—well, if I hadn't seen them myself, I'd never believe it. He carried on the most wonderful experiments with animals. He made *super*-animals. And he had just begun to help people—human beings—"



"Help them to die, like that infant?"

"Help them to live. He worked with poor, broken-down people. He made them strong. But he didn't want his work to be known—yet. He wanted to reach his ideal, his greatest experiment—"

"Which was?"

"Mr. Cavendies and Mr. Mason."

IT was the second time in a few minutes that John gaped. Then he said:

"Listen, Miss Gainsway; maybe you are making sense, but it isn't coming over to me at all. Suppose you start telling me in simple words, as if to a little child, *what in holy thunder are you driving at!*"

"Go back over the history of those two men," she was saying, "and you'll find that neither of them amounted to anything at all until 1929, right after Dr. Medlow's trial. Everybody has talked about how wonderful it was that two men could suddenly seem so—so brilliant, could mushroom overnight into the two most important men of this city. And it was wonderful—probably more wonderful than anybody can guess, far more than even I can know. And the wonder of it was Dr. Medlow. He did it. Those two men were his greatest experiments."

"Meaning what?"

"Just that. Dr. Medlow had discovered—something. It was a chemical, or a chemical process, I think—some way of speeding up the body, mentally and physically, to intensify people, to make them—superior. He called it acceleration."

"Acceleration of what?"

"I don't know. Of—everything. He didn't confide his secret to me."

"Then how do you know that much?"

"Because it was I who *treated* Mr. Mason—"

"Treated him?"

"Yes. I know he called me his secretary, but that was just a name. Really, I was a nurse. I was only a young girl just out of school when I worked with Dr. Medlow, but I liked it, and he trusted me a lot. I first met Mr. Mason and Mr. Cavendies there too—they came for treatment, and sometimes I treated them. And then after the trial when Dr. Medlow went to prison, I—I needed work, and Mr. Mason asked me to come and pose as his secretary so I could continue his treatments. He paid me a hundred dollars a week. I had never dreamed of so much money—"

"Treatments? Just what did you do?"

"I gave him intravenous injections of—whatever it was."

"You don't know what?"

"No. I only know that Mr. Mason got his supply of it through Mr. Cavendies—or I think so. Mr. Cavendies kept contact with the Doctor, I think. And from what I—"

"Wait. Let me get it straight: Both of these men have been keeping up these—*treatments*, since about 1929? Did Cavendies have a—a secretary-nurse too?"

"I think so. I don't know that."

Garland did not press her. Instead he paused and thought over this weird story, not able to believe it, and still unwilling to cast it out entirely. Finally he said:

"See here, Miss Gainsway: Suppose we leave these latter-day miracles and get back to the business in hand. What, if I may ask, are you after? Are you trying to build up something for this Medlow? Did he kill Cavendies? And if so, why did I hear Mrs. Mason wailing that somebody was accusing Mason? Take off your false beard awhile, and let's have some straight talk."

The glance she shot him was not complimentary.

"Is it," she asked, "a prerequisite of all newspaper men to be as dull and as obvious as you seem?"

"All right, I'm dull and I'm stupid and I'm obvious; but I broke in on you in Mason's library just when you were burning something in the fireplace, and then I did hear Mrs. Mason saying that; and pretty soon you come here and get beaned on the head, and admit to me that you've been playing mysterious phone-call games with me. But instead of explaining that, you rave on about some fantastic juice and a prominently discredited medico. If this is a gag, it's about time to come off it—I'm a pretty busy citizen. If it isn't, then for God's sake, make it plain. In words of few syllables, *what do you know, and what do you want?*"

"I want," she said, and her voice was suddenly strong and eager and serious, "more than anything else in the world, to help discover why these two men, of all others in the city, should have died within a few hours of each other. And I want to be sure that the greatest scientist in the world isn't stupidly, uselessly blamed because two of his experiments were—weak vessels, after all."

JOHN considered that. It was a statement not lightly to be dismissed.

"Then," he said, "you have an idea who murdered Cavendies?"



She nodded. "An idea," she said. "But only an idea. I am sure of one thing: he was murdered because of—Dr. Medlow's experiment."

"How do you know?"

She fumbled under her coat and produced a small, neat white envelope.

"Open it," she said. "This is what I almost burned in that fireplace. I found it by mistake, and I carried it about with me for three days, not daring to give it to Mr. Mason. And when Mr. Cavendies died, and then Mr. Mason went almost out of his head, I— Well, you'll see when you read it."

THE envelope contained a square of notepaper which had evidently been crumpled badly, then smoothed out. One edge of it had been charred. It read:

*My dear Dill: I have not heard from you nor seen you since our discussion of last week, and I am greatly concerned. Believe me, I have not ceased to review, study and examine all sides of the question as concerns H. and K-11, and I can only repeat that my decision remains unshaken, that nothing—not even your own eloquence—can dissuade me from my determination to abandon what has become a constant menace to us both and a horror to me. But do come over this very night, Dill, and let us talk dispassionately in our old friendly way. Let me plead with you once more that we are no longer alive for ourselves, that we have become public property, upon whom the lives, welfare and happiness of thousands may depend. Let me urge that it is a far lesser evil that you or I or both should be extinguished, should slip into the limbo of things forgotten, than that either one of us should*

It ended there in charred, frayed paper edges, in illegible characters. There was no signature.

John looked up. "Well?" he asked. "What is it? Who wrote it?"

"It's Mr. Cavendies' writing," she said. "And I don't know what it means. I can only guess."

"What's your guess?"

"That Mr. Cavendies had decided to give up his—treatments, and that Mr. Mason was violently opposed to it."

John whistled quietly.

"That would be reading a lot between the lines, wouldn't it?" he asked.

"Perhaps, but there are other things: For instance, that K-11 could be the name of the acceleration drug, I suspect it, because it follows the pattern of Dr.

Medlow's experiments. He used to begin with some basic formula and assign an alphabetical letter to it, and test its effect upon—well, guinea pigs. He'd make records of each test by number. And when he changed the formula, he'd take another letter and proceed by numbers. K could mean the eleventh variation of the formula, and *Eleven* would be the number of the last experiment of the series."

"Maybe, but it's more likely something else—the numbers of schedules on some of those bills the two were working on."

"But that isn't all. Mr. Mason had already stopped his treatments for several days."

"Stopped them? You mean—"

"I mean I injected the last capsule of stuff last Wednesday—that's five days ago. It was the first time we ever got down to the last one before he replenished it. He used to get them from Mr. Cavendies, I know. But he didn't this time—didn't even mention it. He seemed to avoid me. And he behaved very queerly the last few days. He was even rude to Mrs. Mason in front of the servants. And the evening before he went over to Mr. Cavendies' place—that last night, he was—awful. He shut himself in his study, and I heard him pacing up and down in there. It frightened me. It made me terribly afraid. And when he went over to Mr. Cavendies, I—well, I did have that note, didn't I? So I was sure something awful was going to happen."

"And so you telephoned me, cold turkey—a shot in the dark?"

She nodded.

John thought and thought. Then:

"It makes a kind of sense—and still—According to the newspaper stories, Mrs. Mason and the servants said Mason had been at Cavendies' place several times that week. They actually were working on a bill for the legislature. I saw the stuff. How do you figure it?"

"I—I don't know," she said. "It's all confusing and—"

AT the door there was a sound; the knob began to turn, slowly, tentatively. The girl stifled a scream. John jumped to his feet, glad that he had had the foresight to lock the door. The lock held, but a hand, evidently strong, was now shaking it violently. John called:

"Hey, who's there? What you want? Speak up, now!" But no voice replied.

Then an incredible thing happened: The unseen hand which turned the knob



began to push, slowly, inexorably against the door. The wooden structure creaked, groaned, made sounds of giving. John had an instantaneous thought-flash to phone downstairs and give warning of this strange visitor who came and wrenched at doorknobs. But before he could translate thought into action, there was a dull splintering sound, and the door gave inward, lock and all, as though some terrific force had torn the screws out of the lock-plate.

And the thing that stepped into the room was something scarcely belonging in this world.

The creature had the general outline of a man: Possibly five feet or a little under, he seemed nearly twice average width. He was rectilinear, cubiform. He suggested a fat miniature bull at a county fair whose development was about to burst his skin. Yet he was not fat; the bulge was muscular. As he stood there facing them, framed in the door-frame, his shoulders seemed likely to pop the buttons of his wrinkled, threadbare jacket.

And his face completed the picture of grotesquerie.

It was a battered face, scarred and bruised and brutish. The ears were badly cauliflowered. He had almost no forehead under his coarse black hair. His mouth was fixed in a weird smile.

Miss Gainsway screamed into her cupped hand. John fought for sanity.

"Now, what the hell! Who the—"  
But before he could finish his challenge, the strange visitor turned his blank eyes upon them, almost apologetically, saying:

"Sorry, but I gotta do it. I gotta, I gotta, I gotta—"

It was as though the repetition were an inward echo of the original, all spoken in a queer falsetto voice which did not seem to belong to the man at all. "I gotta, I gotta," he went on, as though explaining. "I don't wanna, but I gotta."

NOW John Garland was a big, able young man, practiced in the rough and tumble of life. He took an angry step toward the intruder:

"Now listen, you slap-happy punk, you get out of here before I—"

The falsetto broke in on him:

"Honest, I gotta, Mister. Honest, I gotta, I gotta, I gotta."

And as he said it, his long, terrible arm moved like a piston. There was an explosion at the point of John Garland's chin, and the reporter slipped quietly, rapidly and painlessly into oblivion.

MR. HURD was not a man to affect late hours. Ordinarily he was abed at ten and astir at six in the morning. Tonight, however, he had departed from the rule. Already it was nearly midnight and the publisher of the *Record* sat in his drawing-room, nervously fingering a book in his lap, watching the mantel clock and keeping an ear cocked for the sound of a ring, either at his door or from the telephone. He had left word at the office to have reporter John Garland call him, no matter what time he came in.

It was five minutes of twelve when at last the telephone did ring. Mr. Hurd lifted the instrument and cried:

"Yes? Hello? That you, John?"

But it was not John Garland's voice.

It was, on the contrary, an odd voice, curiously lacking in resonance and entirely uninflected. It said formally:

"Is this, please, the residence of Mr. J. Selzer Hurd?"

"Yes, of course. Who is this? What do you want?"

"Is this, please, Mr. Hurd himself who is speaking?"

"Yes, I said. What is—"

"How do you do, Mr. Hurd? I am very happy to be finding you so quick. At your office they are telling me you will already be in bed. It is not my intention to—"

"For heaven's sake, man, what do you want? Who is this?"

"I wish to know, please, if you are acquainted with a journalist who is named Garland—John Garland?"

"Of course I am. What about him? He works for me. Where is he? Who is this wanting to know? Are you with Garland? Is he all right? Is he hurt or—"

"I am glad to be able to say that Mr. Garland is quite well now. I regret that there has been a most unfortunate—ah—misunderstanding. Most unfortunate. I must assure you that it is not arising from any intention of my own personally—"

"Then let me talk with Garland if he's there. Hello? Hello! Don't get off that wire. Put Garland on. Who are you, anyway? Hello! Hello!"

For an instant it seemed that the wire had gone dead. It had not, however; for the next sound that came over the wire was the voice of Garland himself.

"Hello? Hello! That you, Chief?"

"Yes, John, what in—"

"Get ready for a big shock, Chief—a wallop. You've got to get hold of Boyd and the coroner and somebody from Headquarters with authority—Lovellev,



maybe. Get them all down there to your place inside of two hours. It will take two hours. Tell the D.A. this has got to be a special investigation—a sort of extra inquest. The whole show has got to be set up right, or it's no good. This is the biggest thing that ever hit town. And what's worse, I don't believe we can print a word of it. Now you—"

"See here, what are you talking about, John? Where are you? It is absurd to think I could get the District Attorney down here for anything so irregular—"

"You've got to, Chief. You've got to—somehow. It's the only way; the Doc won't play ball on any other basis. I'll be back in Firmingham by two o'clock in the morning. We can't make it—"

"Back in Firmingham? Where on earth—"

"I'm in Sleepersville, just over the State line. Don't try to figure things out—just take my word for it, please, and go to work on Boyd and the others."

Mr. Hurd's patience had collapsed altogether now.

"But what is it?" He raised his voice. "You know I can't force the District Attorney nor anybody else to—"

"You've got to, Chief; you simply must. And I should have told you; it's the Cavendies murder. Mason's suicide, too. I've got all the answers signed, sealed and delivered, including the murderer. And listen, Chief, remember that Gainsway girl—Mason's secretary? Well, she's in the clear—and she's O.K. I won't have Boyd and his gang working over her. You make him understand that, or I won't play with them, that's all. Make Boyd agree to that first. We hand him the murderer, and that's the end of it."

"Now see here, I—"

"Let me tell it, Chief, for God's sake. You line those birds up—Boyd and Lovelle and the coroner and anybody else who might be interested. And—that's right, and bring along a doctor—better be a psychiatrist and an official one. We'll need him bad. And get them all at your house at two sharp. We'll be there if nothing breaks. See you then, Chief. So long."

And before the amazed publisher could voice any further comment or argument to this incredible request, the telephone had gone dead in his hands.

WHEN Garland emerged from black unconsciousness into the twilight between sleep and waking, his first sensation was one of motion; his next was



"Mason—or shall we say some person—climbed up that vine."

that of being cramped unpleasantly, and of a complete inability to move his hands, arms and legs. After that came the feeling of dull pain in his jaws, the business of opening his eyes, blinking—and seeing the girl.

He was, he knew, on the floor of a big car. He was not tied down, but thoroughly tied up. Miss Gainsway's position above him made it plain that she was on the seat; and finally he cleared his head sufficiently to observe her predicament as well as his own.

Strong rope was wound around her body, holding her rigid. A loop of the rope extended to her face, where it held in her mouth a crude gag made from a stuffed handkerchief. That she was wide awake was clear from her eyes, which were straining at him almost frantically.

So he made a heave of his body, shifted his position and tried, but vainly, to raise his head above the level of the seat-back, where he might discover who was driving this car, and perhaps, why he and she were in it, and to whom he owed thanks



for a very sore chin, considerable discomfort and a gnawing rage.

But Miss Gainsway's foot kicked him lightly in the chest; and her head contrived, in spite of its bonds, to shake emphatically, as though urging him to make no such rash effort. He desisted, therefore and contented himself with reflection.

Memory was a slow process. He remembered something about that grotesque face that was somehow—familiar. Where had he seen it? He had just been remembering that, when the man hit him. That low brow, those ears of shapeless cartilage, broken and—

The ears, of course, did it. The sequence of ideas was obvious and natural. Cauliflower ears—prizefighters. . . .

And a name flashed in his head like a Very light: "Bat Lucas!"

During John's earlier career with the *Record* he had been assigned to the sports-department in a minor capacity, and it had been part of his duties to cover small-time prizefights of the so-called "ham-and-egger" variety. Bat Lucas, in his memory, called up those days. Bat had been a pathetic thing, a broken-down punch-drunk fighter whose only claim to fame was that he had been able to "take it" longer and harder than anyone else in the fight-game. Then he had gone blind and had suffered a paralytic stroke—and word went about that Bat Lucas was dead.

Yet the man who had broken into Garland's room was, he knew with absolute certainty, that same broken relic of slug, Bat Lucas. But never in his shady career in the ring, John was sure, had Bat Lucas possessed such a muscular development as this short, squat, simian thing which only partly resembled a man. It was Bat Lucas, rejuvenated, recreated, transfigured. Not dead, not blind—and certainly not paralyzed; John felt his fist on his chin. Was it Bat Lucas, he wondered, who drove that car that was flying over some road with himself and the girl in it? If so, what did it mean?

Brakes screamed suddenly. The car lurched, and flung John violently against Miss Gainsway's knee. Speed slackened, and presently the motor's purr stopped.

NOW there were voices, confusion, babble, excitement. Running footsteps crunched on gravel. Amid the general hubbub John could make out the piping falsetto of the man he was sure must be Bat Lucas, saying:

"You go tell him, you go tell him, you tell him, tell him, tell him—"

But before any articulate reply came through, there was the sound of a slamming door, and of another voice, clear, strangely mechanical, icily cold, saying:

"Am I to be told what it is the meaning of this? What thing are you doing with my car, Lucas? Have I not many times told you—" And then the voice broke off with an exclamation: "*Lieber Gott!* It is the little Phyllis!"

The next few instants were a blur. John knew that he was being dragged from the car backward, that Miss Gainsway was being taken out, that the failing twilight had become almost dark, that he was standing in the center of a group of several persons while someone was jerking at his ropes, untying him. Somewhere he heard Miss Gainsway crying:

"Mr. Garland—Mr. Garland! Oh, don't let go, John! Don't—"

With a pleasurable sensation, John dropped into a cloud.

IT was an awakening from sleep, as though he might have reposed his brain and muscle for long refreshing hours. It was dark in the room save for a shaded table-lamp beside which he could just make out a figure sitting.

"Oh, thank God he's coming to!" That was a woman's voice.

And another answered: "But yes, it is the time." That was this same flat, inflectionless voice that had spoken before he went to sleep. It came again:

"Good evening, sir. I am of the hope that you are no longer suffering?"

The speaker was a slight man with a neat medical beard and a deep scar which cleft his face from the left eye to the right side of his jaw. The eyes were round, small, penetrating and impersonal. Under their regard John felt decentralized, incapable, deprived of personality. He did manage to reply however:

"I'm all right. I'm fine. Now who—"

"That is excellent, then," said the mechanical voice. "Permit me that I apologize for your great inconvenience, which was, I assure you, from misunderstanding I do not desire to perpetuate. I am Medlow—Emil Medlow."

Miss Gainsway was suddenly beside him, saying:

"Oh, I'm so glad. I was afraid—that awful man! I thought he might have hurt you so that—"

"But no, my child," said the Doctor's voice, "it is not to be made serious, no.



Look, is he not recovered, this young man? And now we must talk. We must hurry, perhaps, if we are to do that which is to be done."

And John got out: "Look! I'm all right, see? But I wish somebody would begin by telling me what in thunder is going on. What is it, Miss Gainsway? What's it all about?"

"There is coffee here, young man. You will please to drink it while I endeavor to make such explanation as is needful."

John struggled to his feet. He had been lying on a cot or lounge, and another similar lounge was across the room where some sort of figure also lay, entirely covered over with a blanket. There was Miss Gainsway at a round table pouring coffee, and there was Dr. Medlow standing in his odd, stiff way directly in front of John, saying:

"It is very shocking, I am telling you. Very shocking and terrible, I am sure—a matter for the police. But about that I am not so happy, no. I do not—"

"Here's your coffee." It was Phyllis Gainsway coming to him. "Better drink it while it's hot, and let the Doctor tell you. And I think we must hurry. It is already after ten."

"I shall try to be very simple," said Doctor Medlow. "You will so kind be to pay attention—"

John concentrated on the Doctor's story.

SEVEN men sat in an upstairs room at the Hurd place. There was considerable tension among them. Mr. Russell Boyd, for instance, was stating his own feelings forcefully to Mr. Clifford Carter, assistant D.A., and to any or all who cared to listen.

"I tell you, Carter, this is some damn' publicity gag of Hurd's—likely that smart-aleck reporter of his sold him the idea, and he's working it on us. And if it turns out that way, I'll dig into every forgotten law and statute in this town and State to catch the *Record* out of line. I'll tear that paper apart—"

Mr. Hurd, coming into the room, overheard the last of this.

"I am very sorry that you feel this way, Boyd, though I confess I can scarcely blame you. I can assure you, however, that this is a perfectly legitimate thing. In a word, young Garland has found and established the Cavendies murderer, and he is bringing him here."

Boyd laughed skeptically.

"That would be quite a miracle in its own right, Mr. Hurd. We know who



killed Cavendies, and nobody is bringing him in here unless they go beyond the grave for him. Mason himself was the murderer. I can prove it. Besides, his own note, if you read it correctly, practically says he killed him. It's enough of a confession for me and for any jury. And if that isn't enough, I can supply you with both the motive and the method. And I'll tell you more; the only reason I've consented to come down here at all is because of something I haven't reported to you."

"Which is?"

"Your man Garland had some kind of trouble—I don't know just what, but something. The woman who runs his rooming-house phoned the police at about six-thirty or seven, claiming that something violent had happened up in Garland's room; that the door to his room was smashed, a small table overturned, and there were evidences of a fight—with whom she didn't know; she had looked out of the window and saw a man put him into a car and drive him off. My guess is that he is either drunkenly ribbing you, or had a hallucination—"

Mr. Hurd broke in:

"As to that, I confess I know nothing. I only know that Garland seldom drinks, that he was perfectly sober when he called here, and that he called from Sleepersville, across the border. He assures me he is bringing back the murderer."

"Impossible! That was Mason."

"Then why have you kept the information back?"

"Insufficient evidence—until today. No motive. Now, however, we know. The motive was jealousy."



"Jealousy!" Several voices exclaimed at that.

"Yes. We dug into the relationship between those men pretty carefully. It turns out that Mrs. Mason was first engaged to marry Cavendies—that was in 1928 and 1929. She switched to Mason for reasons which aren't clear, but she did switch. It is evident, too, that Mason never quite forgave her for her earlier feeling. The servants claim that recently he was very rude to her, referring often to her earlier friendship with Cavendies. She had gone around the house crying. Everything points to a bad situation, with Cavendies at the bottom of it. Not only that, but Cavendies was planning to go away somewhere. He had a reservation—was flying to Mexico, then to Rio. He was getting away from something—which must have been the untenable situation with his old friend."

"Even so, if the servants testified that they saw Mason talking in the doorway with Cavendies at eleven, then—"

BOYD said impatiently: "It proves little or nothing. In the first place, Mason came back into the house—"

"Eh? Good God, how?"

"He climbed in. There is a thick ivy vine growing at the front of the house and running up to the second-floor windows. Our men examined it, and can show beyond doubt that Mason—or shall we say some person—climbed up that vine, got into the study and climbed down again. Your own man Garland said that the iron grill gate was not entirely closed."

"But according to the medical examiner, the death had occurred much earlier than—"

"Even that is speculative. He was strangled. There was no blood. It is difficult if not impossible accurately to establish the exact time of death under those circumstances. Besides, the man's vitality was—extraordinary, as is known. His resistance to death might not be the same as another's. For that matter, no two persons' resistances are equal. It could have been more or less recent by as much as half an hour each way. And if Mason stood in the hall talking to him, I would say it was a part of his plan. Mason was no fool; he would think of his own alibi, instinctively. But all this is futile. Here we have a motive, a deed, an opportunity. There was no other person on the premises until Garland came, and it seems sure he didn't do it. By elimination, then, it was Mason. And

that death note is practically a confession. I frightened Mrs. Mason into a confession about Cavendies: She loved him. She had always loved him, secretly. I don't mean to imply that she was actually untrue to Mason. I don't think it went that far. But it seems evident that Mrs. Mason never quite forgave herself for marrying Mason instead of Cavendies, and I'll gamble Mason knew it and hated it."

For the first time that evening Mr. Hurd felt a sudden rush of doubt. There was form and pattern behind the statement of Mr. Boyd. This District Attorney was neither a hasty man nor a dull one. If what he said were true, then—what was young Garland doing in Sleepersville? What was he bringing in? Was it possible, even, that Garland *had* perhaps been drinking?

And then a car rumbled into the driveway, feet were heard on the carpeted stair, and four persons came into the room, carrying a fifth on a hospital stretcher. John Garland led them. Behind him was a trim, attractive young woman who would be, Mr. Hurd concluded, this Miss Gainsway. Then came a scarred, frail man. Behind him, holding the end of the stretcher whose other extremity was in the scarred man's hands, was another man who, concluded the publisher, would be a servant.

And on the stretcher under a blanket lay a motionless figure. His face alone showed. Mr. Hurd stared at the face. It was not a nice face. In Mr. Hurd's own mind there came the echo of a very old name which has newly been popularized by the movies. Inwardly he gasped that name. Inwardly he exclaimed:

"Frankenstein!"

Now why, he wondered at once, had he thought of that name?

THE expression of command, "Now keep your shirt on," is not one usually nor fittingly addressed to a man of the dignity of District Attorney, but this is precisely the expression that John employed with Mr. Russell Boyd.

"All right, D.A.," he said after Mr. Boyd's considerable and emphatic expression of what he thought of this whole farcical business. "Now keep your shirt on. You've said your say, and now I'm going to say mine. Nobody cares a hang about your deductions and hypotheses, D.A. Put 'em in your memoirs. All I'm doing is bringing you the guy that killed Cavendies." He indicated the stretcher,



## THE MONSTER-MAKER

which was now reposed on a chaise-longue. "He'll keep like that for a while yet. The Doc, here, shot him full of dope. Otherwise we likely couldn't handle him. Know that face, D.A.?"

MR. BOYD did not know that face. His milieu did not include pool-rooms where ex-pugs are to be found.

"Lovelie, over there, will know him. That's old Bat Lucas, Lovelie—remember him?"

Recollection illuminated Lovelie's face but before he could speak John went on:

"Poor old Bat, he's got a body, but no brains. He isn't a man—he's a missing link. If it hadn't been for Doc Medlow here—" He indicated the scarred man who, in turn, swept them all with his entirely cold eyes and inclined his head perceptibly. "If it hadn't been for Doc Medlow, this poor old wreck of a pug would have been dead long ago. You tell it, Doc. You know the words; all I've got is the tune."

"The case of a subnormal, a thyroid deficient," said Dr. Medlow's iron voice. "His sight was gone. The nerve tissue and the muscular tissue about the eyes was destroyed by brutal beatings. Paralysis had begun. The man was all but dead. At the prison hospital I was granted an opportunity to assist with some of the medical work. Upon my release I obtained permission to care for this poor fellow. I treated him with a process of my own discovery. The result is apparent. I was able to save him, to rebuild his body through stimulation of the glands. The brain, however, I could not develop. He has grown beside me like a great dog. His attachment to me was that of an animal. His gratitude was that of a child."

Mr. Boyd saw no point in all this.

"I don't quite know what kind of a game this smart-aleck reporter is playing—but I've had enough of it," he said. "Either you talk about the Cavendies murder or I'm going home to bed."

"But this is concerning the unfortunate death of Mr. Cavendies," said Medlow in his icy voice. "I was explaining that the murderer is not of the normal."

"You're trying to tell me that this—gnome, this monkey, strangled B. B. Cavendies?"

"He's not trying, he's actually telling you, D.A., if you'll shut up and listen." This was John Garland. "Cavendies and Mason were both taking some dope which Doc Medlow concocted—we'll go into

that more, later. Cavendies was scared of it; he had gone far enough. He came and asked Medlow if, as he suspected, there was a danger in it. There was. He left Medlow's hide-out in Sleepersville swearing he would spill the whole thing—that would have been pretty bad publicity for a man who has already been kicked out of the medical profession. This poor old pug, Lucas, heard the argument and he heard Cavendies going noble and haughty and claiming the Doc had done him a dirty deal with his freak dope in spite of the fact that without it he wouldn't have been anybody. There was a lot of hard talk, I guess. Anyhow, this poor devil Lucas gets the impression that Cavendies is going to do harm to the Doc. That's where he went animal. He followed Cavendies all the way back to the city and saw where he lived. And that night he shinnied up the ivy vine and looked into the window; what he saw, as nearly as we can make out, was Mason and Cavendies having a hell of a row."

"Fighting?" Mr. Hurd questioned.

"I'd say so. Lucas wasn't very coherent, remember. Let's say they were fighting. Let's say it looked like Mason would like to have killed Cavendies, but that he didn't have what it takes. And this poor goon didn't have the brains but plenty of instinct and muscle and so when he saw his chance he crawled in and strangled Cavendies, which was probably his idea in the first place."

"There was no sign of a fight," commented Boyd dryly.

"All right, a *word* fight, then; with a blank brain like Lucas' it wouldn't need much to suggest a fight, would it? Let's say they were just quarreling."

"But Mason—"

GARLAND shrugged.

"Mason was thinking about Mason, as he always did. Let's agree without argument that Doc Medlow's acceleration dope—call it that until you medical men get together—is responsible for making it possible for those two men to get to be somebody—to be higher-than-average. Which they certainly were. The Doc here says there was a catch in it, too—says that he can speed up the body and brain all right, but he can't be selective about it. He speeds up the bad with the good. If a man is fundamentally decent he'll get to be superlatively decent when the stuff works in him. If he's fundamentally a greedy so-and-so and an egoist, he'll be more so. It will be a mania



with him. That's the way I get it. And so Mason was an egomaniac who didn't want to risk losing his pretty house and his nice position in life just because Cavendies went goody-goody and wanted to get back to normal. And so he would kill for it—if he could. He might have murdered his own grandmother. He was that kind under it all. But it turned out that he didn't have to commit the murder himself. This poor goon did it for him. And what does he do? Just nothing. He lets him do it. And when he goes home and thinks it over he gets smacked by the dirtiness of it all and he can't stand himself any more, so he jumps off the deep end. There's your murder and your suicide, as I see it. Now let the Doctor tell his story and try to fill in the blanks."

**D**R. MEDLOW did tell his story: He had been friendly with the two young lawyers, had discussed the far-reaching possibilities of his work, had lamented that public opinion made it impossible for him to carry on, and when they had offered themselves as subjects he had accepted them. Success ensued.

But Cavendies, the deeper, more socially conscious of the two, saw the danger of his pinnacle. He was willing to give up his gains and return to self. Mason, however, was not. Mason was concerned with material things, Cavendies with his own nature, his self.

"Will someone explain, then," Mr. Hurd injected now, "where Miss Gainsway comes into this? And why was Garland assaulted in his room?"

Phyllis Gainsway added to the explanation as best she could. She told of the note written by Cavendies.

"Of course poor Lucas was watching Mr. Mason too," she said. "And of course he saw me and recognized me. I don't believe he knew about that note, of course, but he must have seen me coming out of the house in the afternoon, and followed me."

"Well, he didn't know me," John broke in. "We figure Lucas saw she was going in, and he followed her upstairs and caught her in the hall. Then he heard us talking through the door, and felt we might be dangerous to the Doctor."

"Is Lucas ill now? What happened to him? He looks dead."

"I felt it advisable to give the poor fellow something to make sure we would be able to manage him. Without it, not

even ten men would have been able to bring him here," said Medlow. "It is very nearly time that he recovered now, however. I suggest that the policemen take charge of him before—"

"Sure, and let him wake up to find out he's to get his neck in a rope!" This from Lovelle.

It was as though the squat figure huddled under the blanket on that stretcher had been electrified. Dr. Medlow was barely saying, "Poor fellow, poor fellow indeed," when the poor-fellow-indeed was out of it, on his feet and vaulting over a chair, screeching in that falsetto of his:

"I didn't mean no wrong! I didn't mean none, Doc. Tell 'em I didn't, tell 'em I didn't, tell 'em—"

He was back to the window, standing there, his head rocking from side to side in a curious, hideous gesture.

"You tell 'em, Doc! You tell 'em, you tell 'em! I hadda croak him, I hadda, I hadda croak him, Doc. I don't wanna hang, I don't wanna, don't wanna—"

"*Lucas!*" The word cracked like a shot. Doubtless for long years of semi-servitude poor Bat Lucas had jumped at that sound. He did not now, however. He was up on the window-sill like the great simian he resembled. He kicked his foot backward and flung glass into the yard below.

"I aint gonna hang, I aint gonna, aint gonna!" he screamed. And then he vanished into the darkness beyond the window with a dreadful cry that had little association with this mortal world.

**N**O one spoke. Miss Gainsway's eyes told the horror within. Garland barely breathed the single word: "God!"

Mr. Hurd sat transfixed, rigid, staring. Dr. Medlow's round eyes had no expression. Sergeant Lovelle remained frozen in the half crouch he had assumed, ready to spring upon the unbalanced Lucas.

District Attorney Boyd finally broke the tableau of silence:

"Amen, gentlemen. God pity him! And now I believe that is all that can be accomplished tonight. May I ask you all to be present at my office in the morning for an informal report of these matters. Strictly informal, I assure you." And to Mr. Hurd, publisher, he added: "I fancy the press will not be anxious to make this matter fully public."

Mr. Hurd shook his head slowly.

"No," he said. "No, God forbid!"

Was Dr. Medlow a madman or a miracle-worker? Next month Fulton Grant will describe another of his daring experiments.



# Readers' Forum\*

## A LADY SPEAKS HER MIND

Perhaps your ultra-masculine editorial staff will turn up its collective nose at a woman's letter, but you might as well unbend to the fact that you have feminine readers. If you doubt it, I shall send affidavits.

May I venture the opinion that a few hypocrites exist among your readers? And may I reveal that some of their letters, top-heavy with prize-spurred warmth, have given me good laughs?

Of course, I don't like everything in BLUE BOOK, month after month. Some of the stories play sour notes upon my imagination. But there are enough like "The Banshee Comes to America" and "Unlike Leonardo" to keep me among your followers.

And please don't say that the conclusions of a woman intruder are worthless. My quarter is as genuine as Tarzan's.

Judy Moore  
Birmingham, Ala.

## "SNUG-UP AND R-E-A-D!"

I was heading for home one night recently in the midst of one of those cold spells like we have once in a while, (which the Chamber of Commerce will tell you is utterly impossible), when a tough little kid selling a 5c magazine ranged alongside and made a sales-talk. I told him I didn't want his magazine, but he persisted. "Aw, gee, Mister," he said, "on a night like this you oughter buy one and then go to your room and snug-up and r-e-a-d!" The way he emphasized the "snug-up" part sort of got me, so I bought his magazine.

Warm and comfortable that night, I got to thinking about what the kid said and about how many, many times I had "snugged-up" with a BLUE BOOK and washed my brain of petty worries of every-day life by reading the lusty and vigorous stories contained therein, and I felt sort of sorry that you had lately gone in for those hair-splitting, technical and impossible detective stories.

Why don't we just stick to those writers of robust and red-blooded short stories such as, (to name only a few of the many good ones you have), Bedford-Jones, Fullerton and Mill?

BLUE BOOK has given me so many peaceful and contented hours that I suppose I shouldn't pop off in this way. But you asked for it.

H. M. Keeling  
Dallas, Texas

## FROM SOUTH AMERICA

I am Cuban and have been a regular reader of BLUE BOOK for quite a long time. I am pleased to say that I prefer BLUE BOOK to any

other magazine of its type. That does not mean that it is the only American magazine I read, but when I buy a number of BLUE BOOK, I am always expecting to find a certain literature that cannot be found in other magazines, and I have not been disappointed.

Probably due to my Latin idiosyncrasy, I like stories of bygone times, specially if they have an historical basis (like "The Bishop's Pawn").

Yes, I do read the book-length novels but very seldom the serials. I do enjoy stories laid in foreign countries very much, specially those of more or less really experiences or adventures.

Regarding the crime novels, I prefer them with a scientific plot or modern inventions or discoveries involved.

I do not like war stories; unfortunately the world has too many real ones nowadays.

Munolo Suarez  
Ath. Dir. of National University, Bogotá

## THE TEST OF A PROSPECTIVE WIFE

I am impelled to pay my grateful tribute to BLUE BOOK, the first letter to a publication I have ever written.

Frankly, this is what I like about your magazine: that it combines splendid literary quality with that human, true-to-life quality without which fiction is worthless. I read the BLUE BOOK literally from cover to cover. I have been a writer all my life and I know good writing, even if I can't produce it yet. But I have only been writing for thirty years.

I don't care for crime stories, although yours make even crime interesting. But you make up for that occasional lapse by your magnificent stories of wild life in the raw.

If I were looking for a wife, I would lend her a copy of the BLUE BOOK. If she wasn't interested, I'd drop her into the trash basket. But if she was interested, I'd forget the old saying: "Where singleness is bliss, 'tis jolly to have wives."

Murray Hill  
Camden, N. J.

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\*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; and for the half-dozen or so we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned, and all of them will become the property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed to: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

The response to our invitation has been so generous that we find it impossible to print as many as we should like to—or to give each one the personal acknowledgment it deserves. We therefore wish here to thank the many other readers who have written to us.



# Honesty Racket

**I**N a vague way the Baron was aware of the Fifth Column; but about anything that did not infringe on his personal liberties, the Baron could not get aroused; and so when the foreign agent called at his office, he at first was merely intrigued.

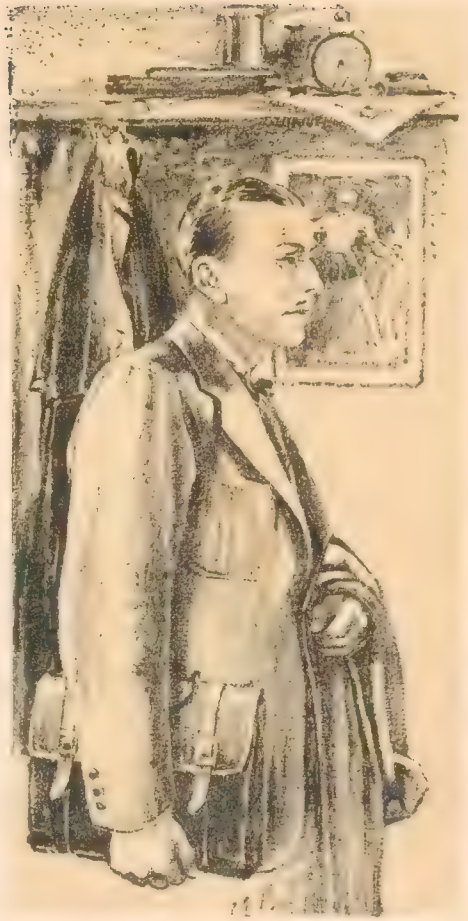
The Baron mistook his caller for an inventor, because the fellow sent in word by the secretary that his mission was private, and entered ill at ease and shifty-eyed, as if suspecting eavesdroppers behind the heavy drapes and peek-holes in the walnut paneling. Inventors were always suspicious fellows who wanted to sell the plant a mechanical nightmare for a million dollars cash.

"We are alone, Mr. Brown?" the caller asked the Baron. "Nobody can overhear us?"

"Quite private," assured the Baron, and almost added, "Let's see it." You couldn't turn the crackpots away, because once in a blue moon one walked in with something. The company's new automatic lathe had been developed from an idea that just walked in.

"We'd better be private," the caller said. "I'm not thinking of myself. I'm thinking of you—Baron." He paused before saying the last word, leaning forward over the desk and whispering it with an insinuating, even sinister, hiss.

The Baron was a bit taken aback, to be sure. These last three years in the honesty racket had been, he'd known, too good to last, but he'd hoped for a few months longer. Nothing showed on the best poker face in America, and he glanced again at the card the caller had sent in. The name was "J. P. Smith," which patently was an alias. The Baron

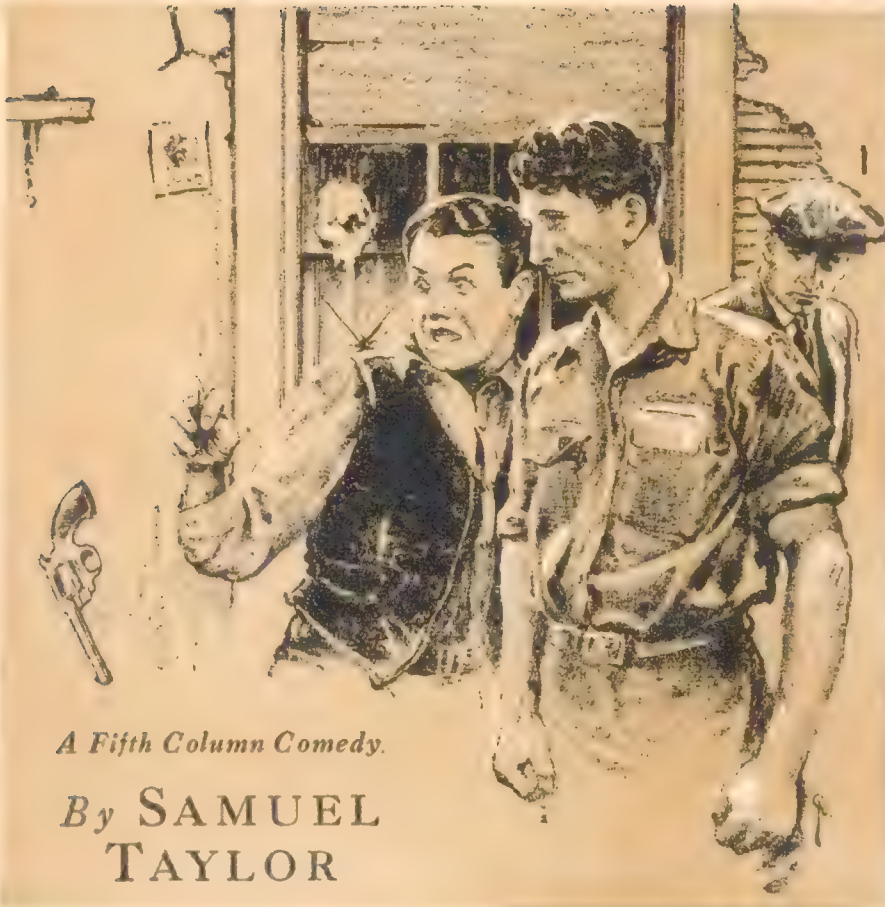


looked up speculatively, and waited. His caller was a young fellow, clean-cut, well-dressed, tall and blond, but a bit too crudely aggressive for the Baron's taste.

"And don't try to stall; I know you, and I've got you cold," Smith was saying pugnaciously. "Pretty nice job you got here, eh, Mr. Brown—eh, Baron? Good salary, fine big home in Hillswood. And your daughter is engaged to marry into the Estrey dough as soon as young Pete Estrey gets back from climbing Shiprock. Everything going fine, eh, Baron?" From a briefcase the young fellow took a sheaf of papers and slapped them on the desk before the Baron. "Don't think I'm bluffing!"

"Abominable photography," the Baron murmured, leafing through police reports, fingerprints, miscellaneous reward-notices with pictures front and profile. He was not ordinarily too concerned with the existence of these likenesses. Pince-nez glasses, a different combing and color to the hair, a trim mustache—little things





*A Fifth Column Comedy.*

By **SAMUEL  
TAYLOR**

counted with a countenance that was fundamentally average.

"And don't try to tear 'em up," Smith said. "I've got duplicates."

The Baron winced a bit at the fellow's crudeness.

"What if I tossed those papers in old E. E. Estrey's lap?" Smith went on. "Eh? Old Double-E would throw a whing-ding. Imagine him finding out his first vice-president in charge of production was the Baron—notorious confidence man and swindler. Now take that time when you faked an original copy of Shakespeare—"

"Don't oversell, Mr. Smith," the Baron reproved gently. "We understand one another." He was not particularly adverse to paying a bit of judicious blackmail if it didn't cut too deeply into his own take. Young Pete Estrey would have climbed Shiprock in a month or two at the most, and then Birdie would marry him. With his daughter married into the Estrey millions, the Baron could—

well, there were many things the Estrey millions could do. The thing now was to maintain the *status quo*.

"What do you want?" he asked.

Smith frowned. "You don't seem much upset. Don't figure I'm kidding you, Baron."

The Baron smiled. "My dear fellow, your build-up is complete. Let's get down to business."

"Nobody ever took it with a grin before," Smith muttered, ill at ease.

"Then it's a business with you—black-mail!" the Baron said, beaming. "You'll excuse me, but you seemed a bit nervous, and I took you for a novice. Well, it's a pleasure to meet one of the profession, Smith; a real pleasure. You're a newcomer, I suppose. No record to worry about, unknown to the police, nothing to fear from the past, and the whole world ahead." The Baron sighed, recalling his own youth.

"Now, you listen here!" Smith protested belligerently. "Don't get gay!



One false move, and you'll get turned over to the police. Our people will be watching you every minute!"

"For goodness' sake," the Baron said with mild reproof, "don't threaten me with your silly gang." He deplored the mass methods of modern crime. He was, he supposed, just the old-fashioned, individualistic type. In the old days—

The Baron blinked at the sudden change that had come over J. P. Smith. The tall young fellow had swept off his hat, stiffened at attention. His heels clicked smartly together, and he cried curtly: "Sir! In the future you will please not refer to my country's intelligence service as a gang!"

"Well, say, this *is* a day," the Baron mused, tapping his glasses against his lip. "A spy. Imagine that! A secret agent. A—what do you call it?—oh, yes, a Fifth Columnist. Do you like your work?"

"Now look here!" Smith growled. "Cut the comedy, see!"

"State your price," the Baron said, wearily. No pleasure at all doing business with a fellow of this type.

"Ten thousand dollars," Smith said. "Cash."

"Preposterous," the Baron said automatically.

"All right, fifteen thousand. But we won't pay a cent more."

"Ahem!" the Baron said, to cover surprise on the best poker face in America. "You are—er—paying *me*. Ahem! But yes—yes, of course. Naturally. *Naturally!* . . . Now, let's see, Mr. Smith. If—harrumph!—you offer fifteen, you obviously are prepared to go twenty-five. That is my price. Twenty-five thousand. Take it or leave it."

"Okay," Smith admitted grudgingly. "You're a good business man, Baron."

Before he thought, the habits of the past three years came to the fore. The Baron rammed the button for his secretary, saying, "Let's put that in writing."

**I**T irked the Baron that his home in Hillswood should be on two expensive acres, that it should have three baths, that there should be magnificent live oaks, a swimming-pool, tennis-courts and all that. Not that the Baron did not enjoy the better things of life. The place would have been ideal, the culmination of dreams, but because it was what was expected of an executive of the Estrey Machine and Manufacturing Co., Inc., the Baron almost would have rather lived in a tent.

Strolling about the lovely grounds that afternoon, the Baron paused at the edge of the pool and felt the gnawing dissatisfaction of a man in a rut. The fun was gone from this honesty racket, anyhow. If it were not for Birdie being engaged to Pete Estrey, he might chuck the whole business. But a man had to look out for his daughter.

He had to smile, thinking how neatly he'd played his cards, at that. A craftsman, he had pride in how he'd slipped into the honesty racket. Three years past, in line of business, he'd built old E. E. Estrey for the kill. It had been just a routine confidence-game with the Baron—building a man's faith in you until he bought from you something you didn't own. Shooting golf with Estrey and two other company executives one afternoon, the Baron's expert eye told him old Double-E was built to a fine point. By the sheerest accident, the Baron discovered he'd builded better than he knew. Searching in a toyon thicket for a lost ball, he'd heard old Double-E Estrey, a few yards off, whisper to one of the executives: "There's a man I wish I could get with us. But of course he's worth too much to his own firm. They'd never let him go."

**T**HEN it was that the Baron got the idea of becoming an honest man. The idea intrigued him. He'd tried other rackets. Why not this, if it paid off?

"Mr. Estrey," he said frankly next day, "I've been thinking our deal over. Yes, it's a good deal for *my* company. But I'm wondering—is it best for *you*?" And then with a little fast talk he had old Double-E eating out of his hand, shaking it, and handing him a position with the company.

The Baron had made a good thing out of the honesty racket. It was much easier, he'd found, to be honest than crooked, and while at times he felt ashamed of not doing it the hard way, he generally could put such thoughts aside by contemplating the progress Birdie was making with young Pete Estrey. There, really, was the biggest deal of his life!

Standing with his thoughts at the edge of the pool, the Baron became aware of bubbles rising through the clear water. Following them to their source, he saw Birdie, submerged, and exchanging a kiss with a young man. The young man was George Greenwold, a protégé of the Baron's, and another reason the honesty racket was irksome. George had shown





"What if I tossed those papers in E. E. Estrey's lap?" Smith went on. "Old Double E. would throw a whinding."

Illustrated by  
Charles Chickering

promise of developing into one of the best confidence men in the country, but of late he'd shown little signs of softening up, losing perspective. In a way you couldn't blame a fellow his age. Nothing to do but hold down a job, meeting people socially who wouldn't know the lost-wallet gag from a turnip—why, any boy was apt to soften up and forget.

"Hi, lamb!" Birdie greeted, climbing out.

"You hadn't ought to two-time Pete in public," the Baron reproved.

Birdie made a pretty grimace. "That stooge! Pete trusts me, lamb. Have a hard day at the office?"

Then she was off toward the far end of the pool, racing George, and making a race of it, too, her round limbs flashing through the spray. So like her mother, so pretty and laughing and full of spirit. "Oh, Kitty, Kitty," the Baron mused softly, "you'd be proud of this daughter of ours. Building up a million-dollar deal, and she carries it like a feather." Dashing a tear from his eye, he went in for a brandy.

AFTER dinner, relaxing with a cigar, the Baron said, "Strange chap contacted me today—a Fifth Columnist."

"Good-looking fellow?" Birdie asked.

"Yes—"

"Let's have him to dinner sometime."

"But he's dull," the Baron finished. "Wrapped up in his work. Quite a bore. Honestly, I never in my life saw a worse job of putting on the screws than the way he worked on me. It annoyed me."

"Well," put in George impatiently, "what did he want?"

"The usual thing, of course. I'm to see that certain men get key positions in the plant, and then there's—"

"Sabotage!" George broke in. "It's sabotage! The plant is making that big order of machine tools for defence, and with foreign agents in key positions it'd be easy enough—"

"You tell *me*," the Baron suggested with soft irony.

"I'm sorry, Baron. I cut you off. What else does he want?"

"Naturally—the plans."

"Of course," Birdie said. "All spies want plans. Have you got any on hand, lamb?"

"Our new automatic lathe is a pippin," the Baron admitted, a glow coming briefly to his flinty eye. "Practically ready. The Government's helped us develop it. Listen, it takes a shell-blank, and in eleven automatic operations— But I'm not supposed to talk about it, to anybody."

"You can't turn the design for *that* over to a spy!" George Greenwold declared.





"You hadn't ought to two-time Pete in public," the Baron reproved.

"This spy," the Baron said with delicacy, "has done considerable research into my younger years."

"Oh," George said. "Then he's got you."

"And he's offering me twenty-five grand, cash."

"Lamb!" Birdie was beaming. "Will I have to marry that stooge, now?"

"Ahem!" said the Baron.

"Well, he *is* a stooge," Birdie said defensively. "Always climbing some silly mountain. And now it's Shiprock."

"Shiprock has been climbed, once," George said. "Why doesn't he go to work?"

"Why should he?" the Baron asked. "He's got half the dough in the State. Why shouldn't he do what he wants to? What good is it for a man to get into a rut and do what a million others—"

"Now, lamb," Birdie soothed, "don't get worked up again over regimentation. You'd better have a brandy."

"It's this confounded Fifth Columnist," the Baron said peevishly. "Ruined my whole day. I haven't told you the worst. He wants the plans—photostats—Saturday night. I told him to drop in any time Saturday and pick them up. But no. I've got to deliver them. What does he think I am—an office-boy? I've got to be here at eight o'clock Saturday night; then I'll get a phone-call telling me to go somewhere. When I get there I'll get another call, telling me where to meet him. Now I ask you, is that treating me like a white man? Who does he think he's dealing with, a two-bit crook? For two cents I'd call the whole thing off. I don't mind taking a clean, businesslike bribe. But after all!"

"I can't see how the detail of making delivery in any way changes the facts of the case," George said.

"Oh, you don't!" the Baron began hotly; then he shrugged and subsided. George was really softer than he'd suspected. Any fool knew that a crook was first and last an utter individualist. His whole career was based on the flouting of the majority opinion. Law was nothing else.

"Lamb," Birdie said, "you're all upset, and I don't blame you a bit. You'd better have a brandy."

NEXT morning at the office the Baron received a cryptic phone-call, warning him, threatening him. The Baron slammed down the phone, sputtering. "Never in my life saw such a bungling build-up!" he snorted. "It's a wonder the whole confounded crowd hasn't been jailed months ago, if this is a sample!" He had a withering contempt for strong-arm methods, force, coercion. A word, a hint, an innuendo—any fool knew that was a thousand times stronger than a bald and childish threat. "For two cents I'd join their confounded gang and organize it on a business basis!"

Entering the office, the mousy secretary shrank back a bit at sight of her boss' wrath. He was usually such an amiable, cheerful man.

"Excuse me," she said, "but Mr. Estrey wonders if you'll drop into his office when you have a spare moment."

The interview with Double-E Estrey didn't improve the Baron's temper. He came out boiling. Regimentation! That's what it was! Old Double-E had wanted to talk about the wedding of Pete and Birdie, when Pete got back from Shiprock. Imagine—a big how-de-do at the



church! Bridesmaids! Reception! Where was the romance in that? Of course the Baron had held his temper with old Double-E. You had to build a deal right. But all his charm hadn't softened the old fool. Wedding breakfast! . . . The Baron thought back to the good old days, fondly, to his own romance. He'd seen Kitty first in a jewelry-store, just as she palmed a diamond ring and substituted a phony under the nose of the clerk. It was love at first sight. They'd eloped with the police two jumps behind, and spent a honeymoon at Long Beach selling phony oil leases. . . . The Baron dashed a tear from his flinty eye as memories flooded up.

FOR a week, the Baron brooded. Each morning he received that crude, infuriating telephone-call. It was the salt in a wound. "Don't try anything," the voice said Saturday morning. "We have your phone tapped, and we open your mail. You are watched every minute. Be careful, Baron!"

The Baron's blood-pressure went to a dangerous high. Phone tapped! Mail opened! Men tailing him! What did they think this was? By gad, this was a free country!

"Birdie," he said upon reaching home at noon, "I can't take it."

"Oh, you poor lamb! I know how it is," Birdie said, looking up from her prone position. She was taking a sun-bath in halter and shorts, in the patio. "I'd tell those sneaking spies where to head in!"

"Shh!" the Baron warned, and glanced about furtively. Then, realizing the state he was in, he stiffened. "By gad!" he cried. "If it weren't for you and Pete—"

"Lamb—" She was up now, and with two forefingers rolling his tie into a ball. An old trick Kitty had had, when she wanted something—looking up sort of sidewise in a wheedling way. Melt the heart of a brass baboon!

"Well, what is it?" he said gruffly.

"Dad, it's funny. I never heard of anything so funny. George said you'd be furious. He said we'd better just elope, and—"

"Elope! By Gad! Pete's coming to life! He's back from Shiprock, then?"

"Not Pete, lamb—George," Birdie said, and then she stood there watching her two forefingers roll his tie into a ball.

"George! You mean—George?"

"I know how silly it is, Dad. We haven't got a single reason in the world.

There isn't an angle to it. We're just in love. George wants to go away and get a job and we'll just live like other people. Isn't it silly, Dad—isn't it? Oh, Dad," she said, and her bare arms came around his neck. "Dad, I want to be a chump like everybody else!" Her voice was tight, and it broke. She shook against him. "Dad, all these years you've wasted on me—"

"Sap?—why—h'm!—bless you, honey-bunch!" The Baron got out a handkerchief and blew noisily. "A chump—indeed! With millions within grasp, you choose to marry a poor but honest man who'll give you nothing but love. It's your own choice, my dear."

"Lamb!" She looked up with big tear-filled eyes. "You mean it, really?"

"Mean it—why, it's the very flower of independence and individuality! Do what you want! *That* is living! As your dear mother used to say, 'Hew to the line, and let the chumps fall where they may.' And she had a line, honey-bunch. She could talk a policeman into his own handcuffs. Where's George?"

"He's around the corner of the house," Birdie said, and ran that way. "George! George! It's all right!"

The Baron stood there in his lovely estate, and the afternoon sun was soft. A bird was cheeping in a bay tree, and a lizard scurried across the patio. Yes, the Baron reflected, to choose your path—that was living. He'd swallowed his gorge because of Birdie. But Birdie's deal was off. His little birdie was flying from the nest.

AT eight that evening, the Baron received a phone-call, telling him to go to a certain drug-store in the city. There, he got another call, telling him to go to a house in North Beach. There, he was admitted to a room. Looking about, he did not try to conceal his contempt. A dingy, dirty room lighted by a single yellow bulb on a drop cord. A rumpled bed, a dresser, two chairs. Such a dive to transact a big deal!

Smith was there, and three big oafish men who were patently nervous and tried to cover it by a threatening leer.

"You have it?" Smith asked. He was trying to stand at attention, and he brusque, but he licked his lips nervously.

"Naturally," the Baron said, indicating the briefcase under his arm. "Pull yourself together, Smith. You'd ought to have a shot of brandy. You have the money, I presume?"



"Yes. You're sure you weren't followed?"

The Baron lifted his shoulders. "I assumed *you* made sure of that."

"Of course; of course. All right, let's have the photostats."

The Baron smiled. "What color is your money?"

This seemed to wound Smith's dignity. He stiffened to make a curt retort when a whistle came from outside. The effect on Smith and his three hulking henchmen was profound. They crouched, looking furtively about like trapped rats.

"A signal, perhaps?" hazarded the Baron.

"Trapped!" one of the big men said, and ran for the rear door.

Smith produced a revolver. "So! Traitor!" He leveled the weapon at the Baron's chest.

TIME was the essential thing; the Baron tried to stall. "Rather melodramatic—" he began, when the roar of a shot filled the room, coming heavy and harsh in the enclosed space. Smith's revolver hit the wooden floor with a hollow thump, and the fellow looked with a certain stupid surprise at a wounded wrist. The shot had come from a policeman outside the window, who now knocked out the glass with a swipe of his revolver, and called: "All right, you guys!" A door broke open with a crash, and three policemen piled in with drawn weapons. The henchman of Smith's who had run out the back way now returned with his arms in the air and a policeman behind him.

The police literally tore the house apart after hustling Smith and his gang away. Smith had tried to accuse the Baron of certain things, but the police had been in no mood to listen. How long that mood might last, the Baron was uncertain. As the police tore the house apart, he tried to find a free moment, but someone was always asking him more details. The police tapped walls and furniture legs, ripped mattresses open, explored metal bedsteads and even the drainpipes of the plumbing. They found what they were looking for in the bathroom toilet tank—orders, reports, a list of names, written on sheets of oiled silk and rolled within a waterproof tube.

"Here's a case for the Government boys," the police captain in charge of the raid said. "But *we* made the haul, and, boy, what a haul! It was smart of you," he said to the Baron. "As soon as they

phoned you to go to the drug-store, your daughter hiked to a neighbor's phone and relayed it to us. And of course when we sent a man into the drug-store booth where you'd got the second call, he found the address of this place where you'd scrawled it with chalk underneath the seat as you phoned. Then we came as fast as we could. You're a brave man, Mr. Brown," he said, extending his hand. "We've got 'em dead to rights, and it's all thanks to you, Mr. Brown."

The Baron looked at the policeman's outstretched hand, and hesitated. He had never shaken the hand of a cop in friendship, and he wondered if it was worth it now to build up for when he could walk out of this.

"Look here," a detective said, interrupting, and showed some papers to the police captain. "Found these in Smith's briefcase. Funny, huh?"

The Baron was almost glad the interruption voided the necessity of shaking hands, even though he saw at a glance the papers were the ones Smith had had concerning the Baron's early escapades.

"A—a curious thing—strange resemblance, Mr. Brown," the captain said. He forced a laugh. "Of course it's ridiculous. Your fingerprints will prove you're not the Baron—"

"I *am* the Baron," the Baron said, and bowed. There was a time to stall and a time for frankness. He could not now simply walk away, so it was best to make no show of resistance.

"SAY, we *have* got a haul!" the detective said, and whistled. "Not only those foreign agents, but the Baron, in person!"

"Shut up!" the captain snarled. And gently to the Baron: "They held that over you, huh? That's why they thought you'd do what they wanted. They held that over you, and after you'd gone straight and become a respected citizen. It's a shame, and I wish I could do something, Mr. Brown—Baron. But you see how it is. I've got to take you in."

"Yes, of course," the Baron said, comforting the captain, who felt badly. "It's your duty, Captain."

The captain pulled his shoulders square with resolution. "Duty—yes, that's it. And you did *your* duty, Baron. When it came to country, it didn't matter about yourself."

The Baron smiled with gentle depreciation. "Don't call me a patriot, Captain. I'm nothing of the kind. I'm just an



individualist. One of the last of the species, I'm afraid. Their technique was offensive, to boot."

"Well, call it what you want to, Baron. But you'd play hell being an individualist if these rats took over and we had a dictatorship here."

The Baron nodded. "That occurred to me."

"Well, then you *did* do it for country, and that makes you a patriot."

The Baron sighed. It was silly, after all, to argue terminology—or anything—with a policeman. There was one more trick up his sleeve, and now it came out, a dagger with a short blade that sent a gleam from the yellow drop-cord bulb.

"Watch out!" cried the detective, but too late. Whipping the dagger from his sleeve, the Baron plunged it over his heart to the hilt. He staggered against the captain, and then went limply to the floor.

"Get an ambulance!" the captain bawled, and added some oaths. The detective leaped for the phone, and the other policemen gathered around, looking down at the Baron's limp figure. One of them would have knelt by the figure, but the captain said: "Leave him be. There's not a chance, but don't disturb him."

"Well, that ends the Baron," the detective said huskily, coming in from the hall phone. "And he beat us again, Captain. He always had an out. He always wiggled away, and he done it this time."

"Yeah," the captain grunted. "But it was a tough out this time. You know, it was funny how he didn't want me to call him a patriot. A guy like him always figures up an excuse to cover up anything that just comes from the heart."

He paused as a siren sounded. It began dying in front, and a nurse came in, followed by an interne carrying a stretcher. "Got here quick," the detective said absently as the interne knelt beside the figure on the floor. The interne made

a quick examination, glanced up significantly and shook his head. The nurse helped him put the figure on the stretcher; then a policeman volunteered to carry her end.

"Well, boys—" the captain said.

AS the ambulance rounded the first corner, the nurse said, "All right, lamb," to the man on the stretcher, and the Baron sat up, carefully removing the dagger so as not to snag his suit with the tiny hooks that held the guard fastened to the fabric. The short blade, under pressure of a weak spring, appeared from its hiding-place in the handle. The Baron took the wheel while Birdie and George removed blond wigs and sundry make-up, and stripped off uniforms to disclose street apparel beneath. They worked fast, because the ambulance the detective had called would arrive at the house in jig time. The Baron drove a twisting course around corners and through alleys.

"We're ready, lamb," Birdie said, and the Baron stopped in a dark street. "We're taking a bus. Your car is parked in that alley where you told us to leave it. Good-by, Dad." She kissed him, and then got out. Following, George paused to extend his hand. The Baron took it, then pressed into it a gold watch.

"Little wedding gift, George. So much to do today I almost forgot about it. Best I could do on short notice."

"No hard feelings, Baron?"

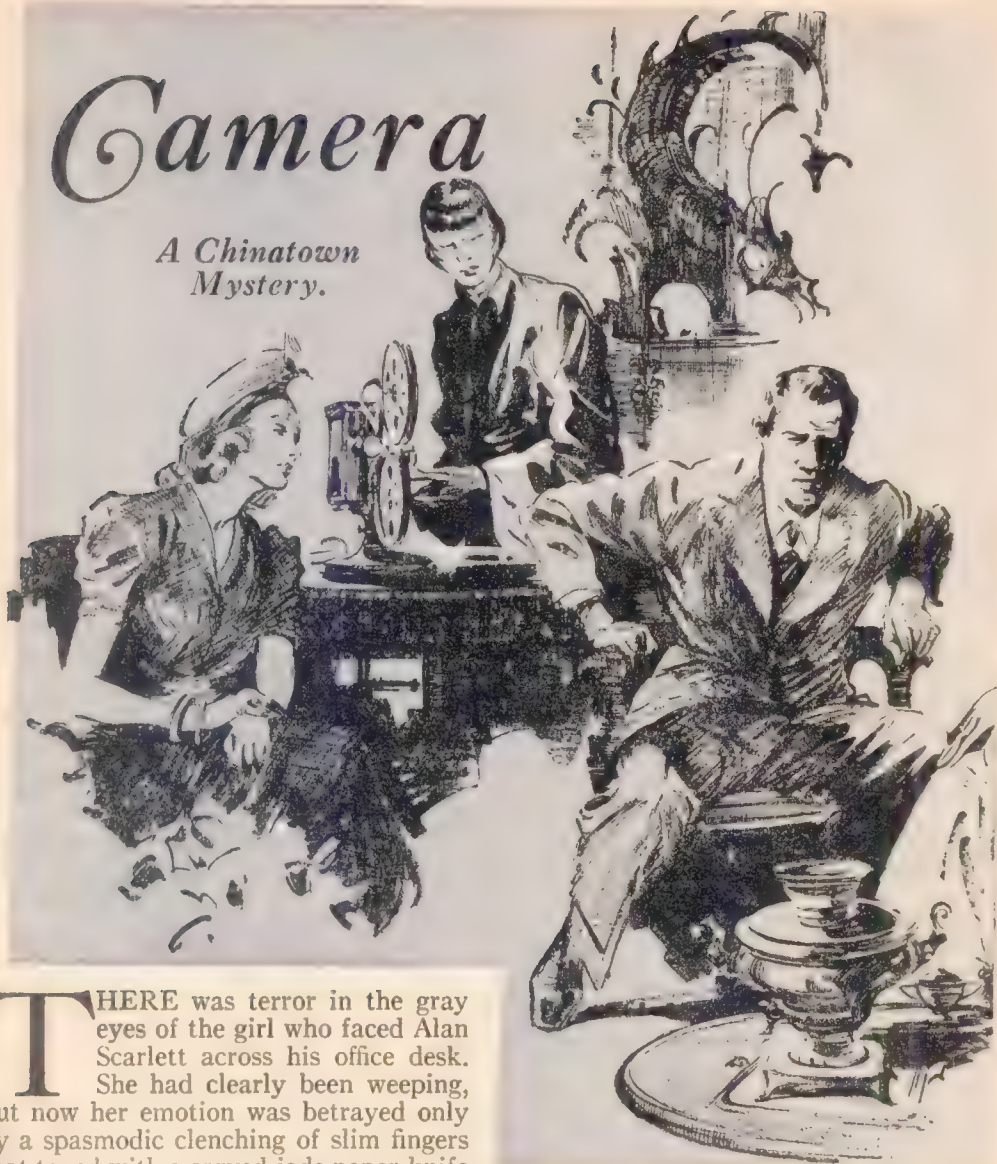
"Feelings? Bless you, boy! I wish I had your courage, is all. . . . Good-by, George. Good-by, Birdie." With a shake of his head to clear his eyes, the Baron gunned the motor. The zest of life was in him again. He'd missed a lot in the past three years. The honesty racket had been O. K., but a bit dull. Too much would soften a man.

"Say!" he called back as an afterthought. "Keep that watch in your pocket awhile. It belonged to the police captain."



# Camera

*A Chinatown  
Mystery.*



**T**HERE was terror in the gray eyes of the girl who faced Alan Scarlett across his office desk. She had clearly been weeping, but now her emotion was betrayed only by a spasmodic clenching of slim fingers that toyed with a carved jade paper-knife she had picked up from the desk.

"I am afraid he is dead, Mr. Scarlett. I warned him that this crazy scheme might cost his life!"

The girl could not be more than twenty, Alan Scarlett decided. Her beauty was of the brooding Scotch-Irish type, the sort that might see hobgoblins in the shadows of dusk. But her husky voice had carried a note of conviction.

Alan Scarlett frowned. "Let us talk not of fears, but of facts, Miss McClellan. . . . Just because your fiancé has not telephoned you for two hours, you think he has been killed?"

"You *must* understand! There is much more to it than that."

"The police—"

"They would not listen, I am sure. You are the only person who can help

me, Mr. Scarlett. Roger isn't easily frightened, but this morning, when he told me over the phone what had happened, he was afraid, terribly afraid. . . . He said you knew more about China than anyone else in San Francisco. He made me promise that if I didn't hear from him within an hour, I must come to you and tell you the whole story."

Alan Scarlett, dealer in Oriental antiques and writer on Chinese art, shifted in his chair.

"That's curious," he said, "for I have met Roger Wentthrop only once. How long have you known him?"

"Two years. Ever since he came back from China. He was in our consular service at one of the coast cities there."

"Why did he leave China?"



# Angle

By HUGH  
WILEY



"His father was dying. He came home at once. Afterward, he decided to stay here in San Francisco and carry on his father's importing business. I am his secretary. . . . We were going to be married last month, but we postponed our wedding because Roger wanted to launch his China Aid campaign right away."

Scarlett's eyes narrowed intently. "I had not heard of this campaign. Just what did Mr. Wentthrop plan to do?"

"Roger is very idealistic, Mr. Scarlett. He has always loved China, and he was passionately aroused by the harm that the people have suffered in the present invasion. He felt that he should do something to help China by stirring the sympathies of the American public.

Three months ago, he discovered a way to do this, and he began organizing the China Aid Committee. I wish now that he had never dreamed of such a scheme!"

"Strange that I have not heard anything about this Committee," Scarlett observed. "What was its purpose?"

"Roger has just completed his preliminary arrangements. He couldn't do much, you see, until the films reached this country."

"Films?"

"Yes. Motion-picture films showing Japanese atrocities against the civilian populations in China. Roger's idea was to have a selection from these pictures shown in every auditorium and lecture-hall in the United States."

"Well, well," said Scarlett. "Do you know how this idea first occurred to Mr. Wentthrop?"

"He was at a small party one evening at the apartment of a friend whom he had known in China. This friend is an exiled Russian woman named Vera Saikova. She was a baroness in the old days. She also is very much pro-Chinese, and during the evening she showed some pictures taken by a Chinese camera-man in the occupied areas. The pictures were horrifying. That gave Roger his idea for arousing American public opinion."

"I see. But why then did he delay in starting his scheme of showing the films publicly?"

"The three reels that the Baroness had were quite fragmentary. But she said that her Chinese friends had a large number of films that they could send to this country, from which a good selection might be made for Roger's purpose. Roger ordered these sent to him at once, and they arrived in port yesterday on the steamer *Maharanee*, addressed to our firm."

"Where are these films now, Miss McClellan?" asked Scarlett.

"I don't know! But I think those films have led Roger to his death! Mr. Scarlett, you must do something right away to save him—every instant may be precious!" The girl's head dropped to her bent forearm on the desk, and her slim body was shaken with raw sobs.

Alan Scarlett walked to a cupboard and took down a small decanter. He poured out some of its contents into a glass, and placed it before the weeping girl.

"Drink a little of this sherry, Miss McClellan. I want to help you find your fiancé; but you realize that I can do nothing until I know all you can tell me

about his disappearance. . . . That's better. Now, what happened to these films after they were unloaded from the steamship?"

Ann McClellan controlled her voice with effort. "Roger went down himself and saw them through the Customs; the boxes were sealed, but he didn't have any trouble. He had a special permit, you see, because he had explained to one of his friends in the State Department about his China Aid project."

"How many reels of film were in the shipment?"

"Roger said there were almost two hundred reels of standard size. They were packed in two big chests."

"Two hundred cans of film!" Scarlett exclaimed. "Did Mr. Wentthrop look at any of these films after he received them from the Customs officers?"

"He couldn't. They had to be developed first. That was why he took the two chests to the Chinese-American Photo Studios right away, so they could be developed."

"Go on."

"It was almost six o'clock when he delivered the films to the studios. Then we had dinner together. Roger seemed excited about the arrival of the films, but a little worried, too. We had planned to go to the theater last evening, but Roger asked me if I would mind postponing our date together. He said that he had to go and see the Baroness Vera Saikova about something important. He took me home to my hotel, and that was the last time I saw him."

"But he telephoned you this morning?"

"Yes. I was at the office. He called me from his house. He was very excited. He said that the owner of the Chinese-American Studios had just telephoned him. When they broke the seals down there this morning to start developing the films, they found that the chests were filled with rubbish! There wasn't a single film can in either of the chests, Mr. Scarlett!"

"Please control yourself," said the antique-dealer gently. "I have only a few more questions to ask, and then perhaps I can begin the job of finding Roger Wentthrop. What was the rest of his conversation with you?"

"He said he was going right down to the studios and try to find out what had happened to the films. He said that if I didn't hear from him in an hour, I was to come and tell you everything. He was afraid!"

"What do you think he feared?"

"I don't know for sure—but who would benefit most by stealing those films and harming Roger? You know the answer, Mr. Scarlett. Those films would arouse everyone in this country against the invaders of China!"

"You are suggesting that Japanese agents have destroyed the films? We shall see. . . . Now, Miss McClellan, I must look at the three original reels of pictures that first aroused Mr. Wentthrop's interest in his scheme to aid China. Will you go with me to call on this Russian lady?"

"The Baroness? Yes—we can drive there right away. But don't let us waste an instant! If Roger is still alive, you must hurry and—"

Alan Scarlett opened the door for his visitor, and nodded understandingly. "We must have patience. First I will leave a few instructions with my assistant, Mr. Flanagan. Then we will go at once to look at these interesting pictures—and to ask the Baroness Vera Saikova a few questions!"

A SULKY Chinese maid, recognizing Ann McClellan over Alan Scarlett's shoulder, ushered the two visitors into the apartment. A moment later the Baroness herself entered the living-room, greeting Ann with an effusive hug.



Illustrated by  
Hamilton  
Greene

"Darling! I am so glad to see you!"

"This is Mr. Scarlett," said Ann nervously. "The Baroness Vera Saikova."

Scarlett noted the sly shrewdness of the Russian woman's glance. Then it was instantly masked by a wide smile. The Baroness offered her hand.

"I am glad to meet any friend of my dear Ann," she said.



"Mr. Scarlett is going to help me find Roger," the girl went on shakily. "I am so frightened. Roger has disappeared."

The Baroness shrugged. "Men must have their little secrets. You will learn that, Ann, when you are married."

Studying Vera Saikova, "The world would call her a beautiful woman," Alan Scarlett decided. "Face, figure, complexion, hair, hands—all up to Hollywood specifications; but the dreamy-eye effect is a bit too theatrical. Wasted on me, at any rate," he reflected ironically.

The Baroness patted Ann's shoulder. "Liu Fong will make us some tea. Russian tea."

"I am afraid we cannot stay long, Baroness," said Alan Scarlett. "If you don't mind, I should like to get some information from you. . . . Quite by the way, may I ask if you ever lived in Japan?"

Wrinkling her pale forehead, "I hate that country!" Vera Saikova exclaimed. "They have killed many, many friends in my dear China."

"You met Roger Wentthrop in China?"

"Yes. I saw him several times when he was in Shanghai."

"Was it your idea that he organize his China Aid Committee?"

"No. He should have full credit for that wonderful scheme. I—I have done all I could to help him."

"Was it you who suggested that the shipment of films be sent to the Chinese-American Studios to be developed?"

"Yes. Their work is excellent. I knew that Roger would save money by having the work done there. Joe Nong Sam is a very clever photographer."

Abruptly: "Why did Roger Wentthrop come here last night?"

Again the Baroness shrugged. "Why should any friend visit another friend? Why do you ask these questions?"

"Did Roger Wentthrop examine the three reels of film again last night?"

"Of course not."

"But you have the films? Miss McClellan said that you would be kind enough to show them to me."

Vera Saikova glanced at Ann, and then walked to a tall lacquered cabinet. Silently she drew out three flat metal cans.

"I have a projector in the closet behind you, Mr. Scarlett," she said ungraciously. "If you will bring it out, I will have Liu Fong draw the shades and show these pictures to you."

The room was darkened, and one white wall of the living-room became alive with flickering figures in chiaroscuro. Ann McClellan turned her face away, but Alan Scarlett missed no detail of tawdry



Alan Scarlett was interested in the window, on which appeared: "Joyful Tiger Heavenly Benefit Association."

horror. Nanking, Hankow, Canton—pillaged cities flaming above the dead lining their streets. Death and destruction in the wake of bombing planes, artillery, raiding infantry. Mass executions. A woman and a baby—

Midway of the second reel, "Please stop the machine at once!" Alan Scarlett commanded in Cantonese. Obediently, the Chinese maid halted the whirring spools. Scarlett stood up and examined the shadowy scene more closely.

"That is enough," he said. "Miss Ann, I believe you told me that Roger Wentthrop spent some years in China. Would you say he was an expert on Chinese customs—dress, habits, and so on?"

"Roger is American," interposed the Baroness quickly. "He knew some things, but China is very large!"

Scarlett switched on the lights. "I have seen enough," he said. Disregarding the Russian woman, he offered Ann McClellan his arm.

"Let us go now," he urged. "There is work to be done."

**I**N front of the office building that housed the Wentthrop Importing Company, Alan Scarlett escorted Ann McClellan out of his car.

"Go up to your office and wait there," he directed. "You will be safer. Do not go out of your rooms. Do not telephone. Even if Roger Wentthrop himself asks you to meet him somewhere, do not leave your office."

"I promise. But you will hurry?"

"I am going now to talk to Joe Nong Sam, the photographer," he said grimly. He watched her enter the building, and then drove off. . . .

The Chinese-American Photo Studios occupied two rooms above a ramshackle lodging-house on Gamblers Alley. The place was bare except for two portrait cameras, and a litter of developing apparatus at one end of the dark-room. On the walls hung yellowed and fly-specked examples of the proprietor's dubious art.

Behind the counter lounged a truculent young Chinese wearing a striped pink shirt and flannel slacks. The visitor addressed him in polite Cantonese.

"My name is Alan Scarlett," he began. "Long life—"

The photographer removed a toothpick from one corner of his mouth. "Talk English," he said. "What do you want?"

Disregarding this breach of the Principles of Right Conduct, "You are Joe Nong Sam?" Scarlett asked.

"Sure. So what?"

"This morning Mr. Roger Wentthrop came here to examine some boxes of film that you were going to develop—"

"Yeah. I phoned him about it. Looks like somebody played a joke on him. When I opened the boxes, there was nothing in 'em but junk. I told him, and he come down here and looked around, and then went out again."

"I should like to see the boxes in which the films were delivered to you."

"There wasn't no films that I know of. When I open the boxes, there isn't a can of celluloid in either of 'em. Just a lot of rocks and stuff."

"Are those the boxes there in the corner?"

"Yeah. Take a gander at 'em if you want." Joe Nong Sam returned to his toothpick, but his beady eyes missed no move made by the visitor.

Alan Scarlett stooped to examine the two boxes labeled with the name of the Wentthrop Importing Company. They were large tea-chests, lined with tinfoil. The leaden seals had been broken. Inside the first chest was a heap of cobblestones, chunks of wood, a two-foot length of rusty iron.

"That is a piece of redwood," Scarlett reflected. "And the iron—a sash-weight. The film cans must have been removed after reaching this country; all the rubbish could be local stuff."

He lifted out several of the heavy stones and peered into the bottom of the chest. Carefully he scraped up a few grains of a white crystalline substance.

Joe Nong Sam came over and stood above him. Scarlett straightened.

"I guess I spilled some hypo crystals in there," the photographer said hastily. "I was carrying it around in a paper bag that had a hole in it."

Alan Scarlett nodded. He tasted the white dust, and grimaced.

"When did Mr. Wentthrop leave here?" he asked casually.

"A little after ten. Maybe the cop on the corner saw him. Kind of suspicious, aint you?"

Scarlett dusted his fingers delicately. "The eyes of the blind need no ointment," he remarked, and went to the stairway.

**A**T the apothecary shop on the corner of Gamblers Alley, Scarlett found a telephone booth and dialed his office number. To the girl at the switchboard, "Is that you, Jane?" he asked. "Any calls for me?"



"Sam Flanagan just called in, Mr. Scarlett," came the voice. "He said I was to tell you that he went to that apartment building like you told him. A little after you and the girl left, the Baroness came out. Flanagan says she's a woman of the world, very *soignée*."

Scarlett blinked. "Sam said that?"

"Well, practically. He said she was a good-looker with lots of class."

"What did she do?"

"Took a taxi. Flanagan followed in his coop. She drove down Sutter and up Grant Avenue. Turned up Jackson, and in front of the Nippon Pet Shop she yanked down the back curtain of the taxi, and then yanked it up again. Then the taxi went over Powell and back to the apartment-building again. She's up there now."

"Thanks, Jane. That means I have to hurry. So long!"

Scarlett went out and got into his car. From a locked compartment he unobtrusively drew out a glinting .45 automatic pistol, and slung it in its holster under his left arm.

He drove up Grant Avenue for two blocks. He parked around a corner, and walked hurriedly through one of the thronged streets that the races of the East have made their own. In front of the Nippon Pet Shop he paused before a dingy shop-window in which lay penned two discouraged Pekinese puppies and a fat tortoiseshell cat.

Alan Scarlett spared them no more than a glance. He was more interested in an empty window next door, on which appeared in two-inch-high Mandarin letters the words: "*Joyful Tiger Heavenly Benefit Association*." It was a Chinese lottery.

Cautiously, Scarlett glanced through the plate-glass window of the lottery office. The reception room seemed to be empty. But a moment later, a little Chinese man in a blue serge suit hurried fussily out the front door. Behind the thick lenses of the man's horn-rimmed glasses, his eyes flickered with terror.

No sooner was the little man out of sight than Alan Scarlett stepped to the door of the Joyful Tiger Lottery and walked in. The main room was clearly deserted. . . . Were the enemy too horribly occupied at the moment to keep a guard out, or was this a trap laid for him? There was no time to ponder that question.

Beyond the little office partition loomed a teakwood door ornamented with

"Maybe the cop saw him.  
Kind of suspicious, aint  
you?"



heavy brass hinges. Scarlett slipped his automatic from its holster. With the pistol swinging ready for action in his hand, he tried the lock on the teakwood door. It opened at his touch.

THE room beyond was dimly lit by beams drifting through a grimy skylight. On a wide table stood a spherical wire cage filled with pellets marked with Chinese numerals—the revolving container from which the winning lottery numbers were always drawn. Behind this was another door. It was locked from the inside.

The enemy would be warned of his coming, but there was no help for it. Scarlett aimed his pistol carefully at the lock and fired. Now the door knob gave under his hand, and he plunged through the doorway.

He paused on a rickety platform above a flight of crazy stairs leading to a dim basement chamber fifteen feet below him. Something was moving on the stairs. Scarlett ducked. Past his head flashed a glittering steel hatchet, hurled by an ugly Chinese in denim who stood halfway down the stair.

"Sin Gum, the killer," muttered Scarlett. "One of the *bow how doy*." He

fired once, twice. The hired thug grunted, and toppled backward.

Alan Scarlett leaped to the bottom of the stairway. The light was poor, but there was no doubt that his shots had been fatal medicine to Sin Gum.

"Come out fast!" Scarlett commanded, in harsh Chinese words. From the shadows at the other end of the long chamber slipped a panther-like figure. "Drop that knife, Yet Gow, or you will lie where your murderous brother Sin now lies! Come here—but not too close!"

Snarling, Yet Gow came forward, shrinking under the menace of Scarlett's automatic. "The wise man does not tickle the lion's nostrils with a straw," he whimpered.

Alan Scarlett replied shortly:

"You will be wise if you do not move a hair for a little time!"

Without removing his glance from his prisoner, Scarlett picked up the fallen knife and backed away until he was close to a writhing form on the dirt floor beside him. It was the body of a youthful white man who had been gagged and bound by jute ropes at wrists and ankles.

The wickedly sharp blade severed the man's bonds.



"You must be Mr. Roger Wentthrop," Scarlett said. "You may thank the charming Miss McClellan that you are still alive."

The rescued Wentthrop sat up and struggled to speak. "They would surely have killed me!" he choked. "That fellow with the hatchet— Scarlett, I don't know how to—"

"We must hurry. Please listen. As soon as you feel better, I will ask you to tie the hands of our friend Yet Gow here, so that he cannot escape. Then I must make a telephone-call; I saw a phone in the office upstairs. The little manager of this lottery layout is not there; he left here just in time to escape being involved in a murder-charge. . . . I see that the famous cans of moving-picture film are stored here." He pointed to a glinting stack of metal containers in the far corner. "Curious, Mr. Wentthrop, isn't

"One of the bow how doy," muttered Scarlett. He fired.



it, that anyone should be willing to kill others to possess what those tin cans hold?"

Leaving the recovered Roger Wentthrop on guard over the vanquished Yet Gow, Scarlett climbed the stair, and in the office dialed a number that connected him with a certain well-known division of the U. S. Treasury Department.

"Mr. Stanning, please. . . . Stanning? This is Alan Scarlett. I've got some work for you. Send your squad to the Joyful Tiger Lottery office on Jackson. I'll wait for you here. . . . Yes. A big haul. Your men might pick up Joe Nong Sam at the Chinese-American Studios on your way. . . . Don't waste any time. I have a date right away with a very interesting lady!"

WHEN Alan Scarlett, with Roger Wentthrop, drove up to the Baroness' apartments, Sam Flanagan hurried over to speak to his employer. Sam, who had once been a special police officer, visibly refrained from saluting.

"The Russian is in her apartment now, boss," Flanagan reported. "A few minutes ago, that young McClellan girl arrived and went up to see the Baroness."

"We must hurry!" exclaimed Scarlett. "Come with us, Sam. This looks like the finish."

At the door of the Saikova apartment, Scarlett pushed past the Chinese maid. In the living-room sat the Baroness with a decanter on a table at her side. Opposite her sat Ann McClellan, a filled wineglass in her hand.

"You promised me you would not go out anywhere," said Scarlett to Ann. "This is not wise."

"I'm sorry," the girl faltered, putting down her glass. "I—I got terribly fearful again when I didn't hear from anyone. I thought the Baroness might have some news. Have you—"

Then she caught sight of Roger Wentthrop. She came to his open arms.

Roger Wentthrop patted Ann's shoulders. "I've been a fool, dear!" he said. "The only sensible thing I did was to tell you to get help from Mr. Scarlett—"

The Baroness rose elegantly from her place. "Such a pretty lovers' meeting!" Her voice was edged with sarcasm. "So now everything is well."

"Everything is not well," said Alan Scarlett abruptly. "Miss Saikova, last night the film-cans were removed from their chests in Nong Sam's studio. They did not contain film. You know what

they did contain. Japanese morphine! The biggest smuggled shipment of morphine this year! The stuff was taken to the Joyful Tiger Lottery office to be distributed. You know the place. Roger Wentthrop was to have been murdered there today."

The Baroness shrugged. "I know nothing about these things."

"You know everything about them! You yourself gave the signal to the Chinese killers. You did not dare to allow Roger Wentthrop to live!"

"Why should I want to hurt Roger? He is my friend!"

"He was your cat's-paw! But last night, after getting the shipment through the Customs, he began to think things over. He came to you after dinner and had you run the three reels of film again. Once he suspected a forgery, his knowledge of Chinese customs showed him the errors in those films. I noted several of them myself. The pictures were made in Japan for your purpose. Quite clever forgeries, on the whole—but there was at least one bad mistake. A poor Chinese woman was impersonated by a well-known Japanese actress named Tama. Some of the Chinese troops wore the wrong uniforms—"

The Baroness glared. Ann McClellan released her lover's hand, and lifted her glass of wine nervously to her lips.

SCARLETT struck the glass from the girl's hand. "Don't touch that! You see, I know something of the history of this woman who calls herself the Baroness Vera Saikova! I think her career as the head of a million-dollar morphine ring is over now."

"Not yet, you devil!" The Russian woman leaped forward at Alan Scarlett. In her right hand flashed a thin blade of steel. Her face twisting with barbaric fury, she stabbed downward.

The bunched knuckles of Sam Flanagan's fist jolted against Vera Saikova's jaw. The woman toppled to the floor.

"I hate to hit a lady," said Flanagan apologetically, "but she might have hurt you, boss. She's kind of mean."

Ann McClellan gasped. "You think she poisoned my wine, Mr. Scarlett? But why? Why would the Baroness try to kill me?"

Alan Scarlett examined the gashed fabric of his coat sleeve. Then he looked up at the lovely, youthful face of Ann McClellan.

"Why, indeed?" he murmured.



**T**HERE are bright red seats under palms trees in the Casino garden at Monte Carlo, and a couple of German soldiers were sitting near Gerry and me; they wore forage caps, belts with flat buckles, and heavy automatic pistols.

Some Frenchmen were removing sandbags from around the doors and windows of the Casino itself, and half a dozen Italian infantrymen were clumping away from the place; they'd been inside, looking at the most famous gaming-rooms in the world. They waved to the Germans as they went swaggering past, and the two Germans waved back. It was odd, but you could see a lot of odd things in occupied France just then. Gerry and I, we didn't fit into the picture, either.

He was from Los Angeles and I was from Pittsburgh. He wore an ambulance driver's uniform and I had old jeans, with a Red Cross brassard sewn high on the sleeve of my shirt. We had nothing else; no money, no papers of identifi-

cation, no ration-cards. We'd lost everything when the ambulance was burned out, halfway through the big blitzkrieg.

I realized, now, that we'd been wrong to come south; we should have made for the Spanish border. Only we'd lost touch with our field unit, and German tanks had cut us off from Paris. We had expected to get a boat out of Marseilles, but the Italians had invaded the country and they headed us off.

We had to report to them twice a day, here in Monte Carlo. Until some American consulate identified us, we were stuck. Also, we were liable to be shot if we put a foot wrong, because the Italians didn't like us at all. They wouldn't even feed us. We would have starved but for the girl who gave us a hand-out in front of the Casino every morning. We were waiting for her now.

It was warm in the sunshine, and I could see terraced hills back of the town, where houses showed yellow and blue and Indian red. Below and behind us was



# Madness

*The author of "The Smoky Road" gives us a stirring novelette of an American's terrific race during the German-Italian occupation of the Riviera last summer.*

By **BARRÉ LYNDON**



the Mediterranean, green and sparkling, with tamarisk trees growing along the boulevard by the little harbor.

It was all very pretty, but I was too hungry to appreciate it. Gerry, practically fresh out of college and barely half my age, didn't feel it so much. I looked at him as he lounged beside me on the seat. He had the clean-cut cheekbones which, if you notice, are getting to be a characteristic of your true-born American—and he was a lad who was hard to scare, as I had discovered when we were carrying wounded at Arras in the bombing raid that finished us.

He'd been racing jalopies on tracks around Los Angeles, having no job to go to when he graduated. All you need for jalopy racing is a ten-year-old car, and some nerve. He must have been good, because he'd made five hundred dollars out of it when he found that this would be just enough to pay his passage to France and buy the uniform of a volunteer ambulance driver.

All the drivers in our eight-ambulance unit were ex-college boys. The mechanics servicing the machines were volunteers, too; they received free rations and their passage had been paid, but they got no wages. As I hadn't been working in a long while, I'd taken what seemed a chance to do something useful.

Gerry glanced up when he discovered that I was looking at him. He'd been reading a throwaway which he'd picked off the street. Copies of it were stuck everywhere: it announced a carnival parade and an "*automobile sportif*," whatever that might be. The whole thing was being organized by the Italians; the war was as good as over in that part of the world, and they were trying desperately to bring life back to normal. They seemed to think a carnival would help.

"Why don't we find out about this automobile thing?" Gerry asked. "We might make a few bucks."

"It'd be something to do," I agreed.

"We might even make enough money to buy our own grub!" he said. "I don't like taking it off Julie all the time."

Julie was the girl who was feeding us.

She had an American mother, but her father was a Frenchman and the Germans were looking for him. Julie herself had become stranded by a breakdown in the underground system which was slipping wanted refugees out of France.

She was a wanted refugee. If the local Italians found out who she was, they'd turn her over to the Germans, who would put her in a concentration-camp and hold her for a hostage until her father came through with whatever they were after.

Neither Gerry nor I could do anything to help her. We could only sit by and take the grub she risked bringing us, and hope to heaven that the underground men would finally get her safely out of it all.

NOW the Germans on the seat near by pushed themselves to their feet and went on; I knew by the colors on their shoulder-straps, and by the buttons on their caps, that they were *Schutzstaffel*. There was half a company of these tough S.S. men in the town, hinting at what was going on under the surface.

All you could actually see in Monte Carlo, once the gayest and most extravagant city along the Mediterranean coast, were the strutting Italian troops, a few Germans, and the sad French people moping about. Half of the houses were closed, and all the luxury hotels had shuttered windows, except those which the conquerors had taken over.

Everything appeared quiet, but a lot was going on. Many times we had seen S.S. troops take a man with a paper-white face and push him into a truck. Sometimes it had been a woman. Often we heard quick, brief shooting after the sunset curfew. At first, I thought a lot of rich refugees were still in hiding, with their money and jewels, and were being rooted out.

But Julie had given us the right angle.

M<sup>ONTE CARLO</sup> was a point on the underground system, which now existed in every occupied country. Only the town had suddenly got hot. Secret police had moved in with the S.S. men, and, apparently, the system could not pass Julie on for the time being.

She posed as a French girl. She spoke the language like a native, because she had lived in France as a kid; after that she had gone to school near her mother's old home in Maryland. The family had been split up by the blitzkrieg and her mother, she said, was clear. She knew that under-cover men had got her father away, but she didn't tell us why the Germans wanted him so badly.

We'd met her almost three weeks before. She had recognized Gerry's uniform, and had stayed around until she felt it was safe to speak. Where she slept, or how she got the food for us, we didn't know. But she was lonely, and always remained with us until curfew time.

Presently, I saw her coming along the sidewalk, walking slowly and watchfully and carrying a big beach bag. She was nineteen, maybe twenty, more than just pretty. She had dark hair with glints in it, and lashes long enough to be veils. She had grand teeth, and a quick smile which made you like her a lot. Southern beauty, with a lot of French charm added, makes a very captivating combination.

"Hello," she said quietly, and sat down by us.

"Any news?" Gerry asked.

"Not yet," she said, which meant that she was still waiting instructions.

She had brought one of those flat, round French loaves; they're all holes

and crust, but they taste good. There were chunks of sausage and some cheese and four apples.

We dipped into the bag and ate without making too much show of what we were doing; we didn't want any nosey cop to ask where she got the food in that town where everyone except the soldiers went hungry.

She watched Gerry with the same kind of look that people have when they watch a hungry kid wolfing his supper. They liked one another.

"Is there any good news for you yet?" she asked presently.

"No," I said.

The Italians were supposed to have written to the American consulate at Lisbon, asking about us; no answer had come through. I saved one of the apples and a hunk of bread. Gerry finished his.

"When we get to New York, Julie," he said, "I'm going to buy you dinner at the Ritz."

"What with?" I asked him. "You'll still be broke."

"He can scare up a nickel and buy me a bag of peanuts, and we'll eat them in Central Park!" She laughed. "Wouldn't it be heaven to do that?" Then she went on: "I tried to get here earlier, and I've brought something else for you, Gerry." She raked in the bag. "That *automobile sportif* thing is really an auto race. I've collected a copy of the regulations for you."

She had been impressed by the fact that Gerry had driven cars back home and, in a way, it was his interest in that kind of work which made him and me stay close together. She remained impressed, even after Gerry had explained what jalopy racing was, and she had promised to find out about the event the Italians were putting on.

"They're reviving a race which used to be held here every year," she said, and showed the papers she had brought.

I<sup>T</sup> didn't take much guessing to see that the Italians were organizing this carnival thing for its propaganda value. People would think that conditions were not so bad in occupied territory, if the conquerors were arranging fêtes and parades and staging auto races.

This one, it seemed, was called the Grand Prix de Monaco, which meant nothing to me. On the back page of the regulations was a list of previous winners and speeds. The whole thing was in French, and the figures were in kilo-





"My brother left the car here," said Julie to Gerry. "It's yours if you want to drive it."

meters. We did a little arithmetic and found that this race had never been won at more than sixty miles an hour.

"I've averaged eighty with an old car many a time!" Gerry exclaimed. "If that's as fast as they go, maybe we could get into this!"

"Where's the course?" I asked.

"Right here!" Julie said, and pointed to the road running through the Casino gardens. "It goes past the railroad depot, dips down to the shore, then goes along the harbor and back to where we're sitting."

"Right through the streets?" I asked.

"We used to race jalopies through the streets on the edge of Los Angeles, until the cops stopped us," Gerry said. "This sounds like the same sort of thing!"

The course was two miles long, and one hundred laps made the race, Julie told us. She added that the Italians would supply competitors with necessary gasoline and oil; they'd commandeered all there was, anyhow.

"If they're giving away free gas, all we need is a car," Gerry said.

"Then you'd enter for it?" Julie asked.

"You bet!" he said.

She looked at him a moment. "If you mean that, I know where there's a car," she told him.

"You do?" and he sat up, staring.

"Yes!" she said.

I stared with Gerry, because a little excited note had come into her tone. She looked at us in turn, then began to talk quickly and what she said, as we sat there in front of the Monte Carlo casino, got me as much as it got Gerry.

She told us that the townfolk were going to boycott the carnival; not a single one of them would come to watch the race.

"The people here are terribly bitter," she said. "You see, they know that the Italians are going to keep this part of France!" She bent to us along the seat. "I'm as much American in my heart as you are, but one half of me is French and it makes France my country, too! So I know how these people feel, and how unhappy they are because their country is going to be broken up."

"It's lousy," Gerry said.

"So they aren't going to do anything about the carnival, and not a Frenchman will so much as turn a wheel in the race,"



"We come to present our compliments, and to ask if you wish assistance."

she said, and now her voice was shaking. "There will be only Italian and German drivers, and if you were to ride, you'd be the only man against them! Do you see what I mean?"

She put a hand on his arm. "The people here are just dying for someone to get up and show the Germans that they haven't quite got everything their own way! They'd love you for driving against them, Gerry, and it would give them fresh heart." She said: "It would be an absolutely grand thing to do, and I'd be very proud!"

He stared at her for a moment. "Well, if you know a car I can use, let's look it over," he said, and I could tell that he was puzzled by her manner. So was I—for she seemed so worked up about it.

WE spent a little while looking at the course before we went to find the car. There were some very sharp down-grade turns by the railroad depot, but the rest of it didn't appear too bad. Gerry figured he'd be able to get around it pretty quickly, after a little practice.

The car was in a garage on a hill, back of the town. There was almost no traffic in the streets through which we went. The Frenchwomen all wore black, and the shuttered windows of the closed houses stared in the sunshine like dead eyes. The grass in the squares and yards was neglected, and balcony flowers had withered from want of water.

The garage was locked up, and Julie brought a man from a café; a thin man who limped badly and who had a face that you couldn't forget. There were almost no lashes to his eyelids, and the skin was tight on the bones of his face so that, somehow, he looked as though he had burned himself out.

Ledoux was his name, and I'd seen men without eyelashes before. They rode the board tracks in the days when I'd owned two Duesenbergs, and fighting it out at a hundred and more, wearing no goggles, the wind tore their eyelashes away.

We had to move clumsy French sedans and coupés to get at the car Julie wanted us to see; and I wondered how she knew it was there. Ledoux dragged a dust sheet away, and what he showed us was no jalopy.

It was a single-seater, road-racing machine with numbers still on its wide radiator guard and stumpy tail. The bodywork had been flecked by flying stones, and the twin exhausts had blasted black streaks along its tail. I knew I was looking at something built by men who knew their work.

"*Très bon bolide!*" Ledoux told me, "*Grande vitesse!*" which was his way of





saying that it was a good machine and plenty fast.

Gerry said: "Oh, boy!" to himself as he peered into the narrow cockpit. He put a hand on the corded steering-wheel and said: "Oh, boy!" again, very softly, then kicked at a tire in the way any man does when he's looking over a car. "If this is the sort of machine they're using, it's no jalopy contest!" and he laughed a bit.

"This car ran the last time the race was held," Julie told us, and pulled at the fat straps over the motor hood. "My brother drove it."

That was the first we'd heard of any brother, but it accounted for her knowing about the car. Ledoux helped free the straps, then he lifted the hood.

We saw a V-sixteen-cylinder motor, and low on the side of the cylinder block was the name: Paulin-Rheims.

"My father built this motor," she said. "He used to have an aéro-engine works at Rheims."

I remember that the French had used Paulin motors to power some of their fighter planes. If Julie's father had designed them, then he knew things useful to the Germans now that they'd occupied his works. That must be why they wanted him, because they were trying to turn all France's war production against England now.

"My brother left the car here after the last race. Then the war began, and he had no chance to move it." She smiled

at Gerry. "So it's yours if you'd like to drive it."

"I've always wanted to handle a machine like this!" He walked around it, then looked at me. "Let's go and put my name down!"

"You're sure?" I asked. "You've only driven jalopies. This is a fast number, Gerry!"

"How fast?" he asked.

"It's geared down to this circuit." Julie had probably learned that from her brother. "It won't do more than a hundred and thirty."

"A hundred and thirty miles an hour, wow!" Gerry glanced at me, then looked back to the machine as he said slowly: "Still, I think I'd like to take a crack at it." He asked: "If the others are as fast as this, what makes them so slow in the race?"

"I think it's the corners," said Julie. She was right. It was the corners.

THE race office was near the starting-point, down by the harbor. In eight years of pushing machines around board tracks, and after four cracks at Indianapolis, I knew the details to ask about. Incidentally, I splintered an ankle going through the infield guard rail at Rockingham, which had changed me from a race-driver into just another mechanic.

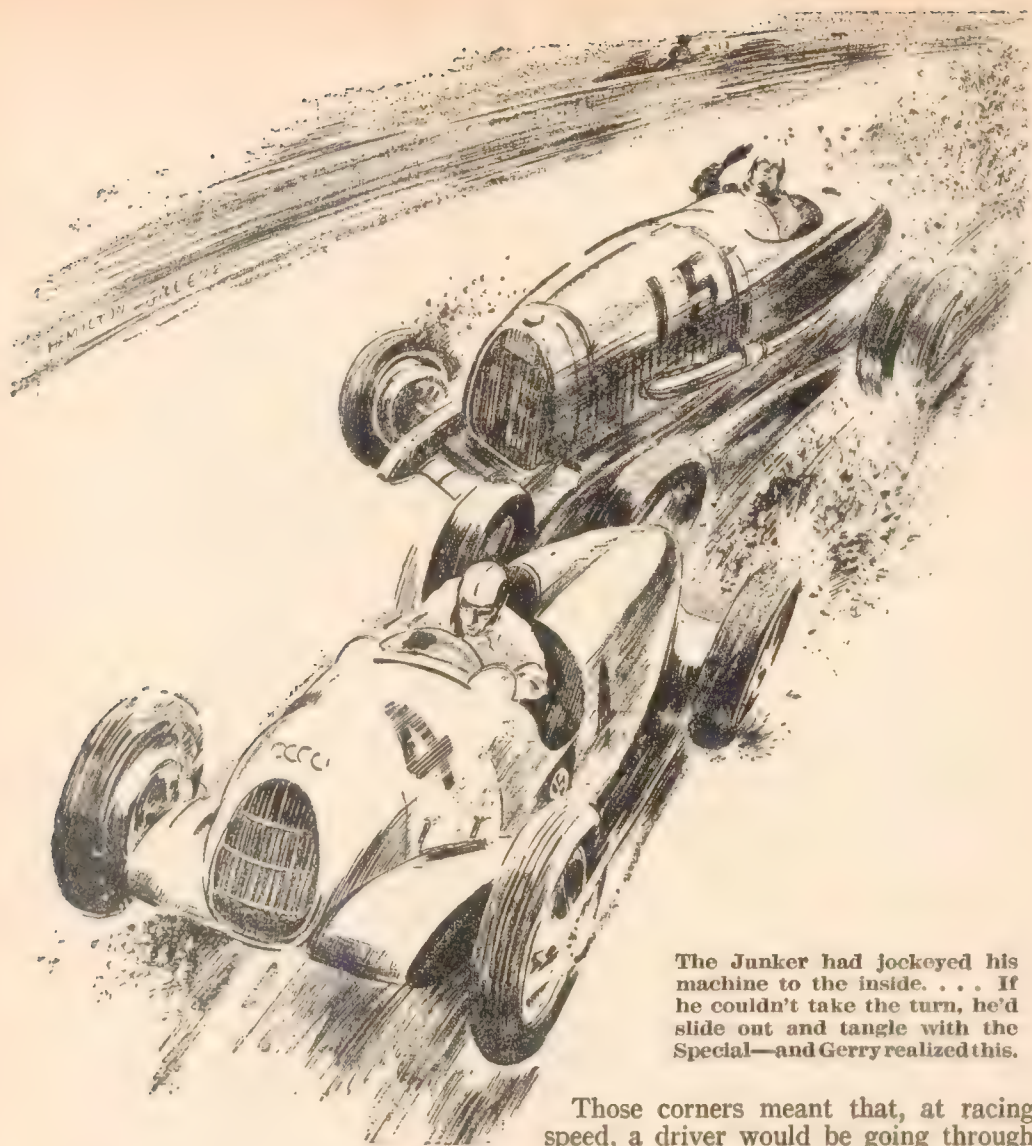
The Italians seemed tickled to death at the idea of an American entering the race, and did all they could to help us. There was an entry fee of ten thousand francs, which is around two hundred dollars in real money, but they waived that. Practice was to start in four days' time, but if Gerry wanted the course cleared before then, they said they'd arrange it.

They told us that gasoline, oil and tires were ours for the asking, together with anything else we might need. They stipulated, however, that Gerry must ride under America's racing colors, and said they would send along material for repainting the car.

"That's because they want the chance to beat an American," Julie told us afterward.

"If the entry fee is two hundred bucks, there must be some nice prize-money in this," I figured, and there was. The winner would take the equivalent of two thousand dollars, and the leader on every fifth lap collected twenty dollars; an arrangement which would keep up the speed of the race.

With Julie translating, we studied the regulations more carefully, and then I



The Junker had jockeyed his machine to the inside. . . . If he couldn't take the turn, he'd slide out and tangle with the Special—and Gerry realized this.

began to realize what we were getting into. The race was open only to Grand Prix type machines, like the one in Ledoux's garage, and when we took another look at the course I began to notice things that I hadn't seen before.

I'd heard a little about European "round-the-houses" circuits. This kind of road-racing was started because it was more exciting than straightaway events; you take everything on the course just as it happens to be. They don't move a thing out of the way.

Apart from awkwardly placed street-lamps, an arch with twenty-foot walls flush to the road-edge, and a curving tunnel under pigeon-shooting grounds along the promenade, I counted twelve real corners on the circuit and almost no straights.

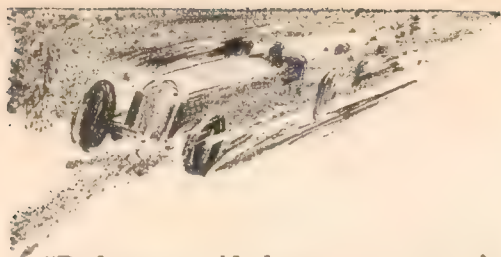
Those corners meant that, at racing speed, a driver would be going through a turn on an average of once every ten seconds. That meant pitching your car into a corner as hard as you knew how, accelerating for the next, braking for it, shifting gear, then holding the machine through the turn, then accelerating again—doing it every ten seconds, and sometimes a bit quicker than that.

The winners from previous races were, I discovered, all crack European drivers, and the course was so tough that even they had not been able to lap at better than a mile a minute. It seemed to me that this was a race for drivers who knew what they were doing, not for a man from jalopy circuits on the Pacific coast.

I put all this to Gerry, and he listened quietly, the way he usually did.

"It's a week before the race, and I can learn a lot in that time, if I practise hard," he said.





"Perhaps you'd better not try it, Gerry!" Julie exclaimed. "You might kill yourself, and then I'd feel responsible." She smiled, but there was feeling behind her words.

"Look," he said to me, "I started racing because it was the thing I liked best to do."

"Me too," I answered, "but all I've got out of it is a bum ankle."

"You had a lousy break," he said. "But you know a lot about handling cars."

"Not on this kind of course!"

"Enough to teach me something," he replied.

I pointed out that the Italians would whip up some good men for the event, and that it would be a real race, if only to help the propaganda angle. It meant that Gerry couldn't have much chance to do any good.

"Just the same, I'd like to try," he insisted. "Maybe I won't make much of a show only, if I do start, it'll be with the idea of licking the hides off these wops and Heinies!"

"How I'd love to see that!" Julie said, between her teeth.

"Well, I'll take a crack at it," he told her and he wasn't talking for effect—he was looking at a little old Frenchwoman in dusty black, who chanced to be passing. We heard her hiss below her breath at two Italian soldiers coming along the sidewalk. Gerry watched her step into the gutter to let them go by.

JUST before the curfew bells began to ring, we pushed the car from Ledoux's place to a small, empty garage along the street. There was a loft above it where Gerry and I could sleep, and we started stripping the machine right away, Ledoux helping.

I got a big kick from working around a real car again, and this was a good one. The chassis had been built by Bugatti, who made about the only worth-while racing cars in France, and the motor had all the power that we could use. The car had been left just as it was after the earlier race, so now everything had to be looked over.

The Italians provided gasoline for a roadster that Ledoux had in his garage and, next day, Gerry used this to survey the course and figure his best line through the corners. Julie rode with him.

There must have been a good grapevine in the town, because we soon had a little crowd of French people hanging about the garage door. There had been a lot of auto racing in that part of the country, and Ledoux, I gathered, had handled machines himself in the old days; more recently he had tuned cars for local events. Some of his friends began to drop in; like Ledoux, they were middle-aged and just as experienced. They couldn't keep their hands off the car, and we had six of them working with us by noon of that day.

People began to slip things into the garage: presents for us and for Gerry. There'd be an egg with "*Bonne chance*" written across the shell, a jar of preserves, maybe a canteloupe, and a couple of times we had pie. That was pretty nice, when you remembered that there was hardly any food in the town. Bottles of wine turned up, when all wine was supposed to have been handed over to the Italians; Ledoux and his buddies certainly appreciated those gifts.

WITH the help we were getting, I was able to study the course with Gerry; he had to name a reserve driver, anyway, and I was the only American available. I knew that my ankle was okay as long as I didn't do too much with it, and it wasn't likely that I'd have to handle the machine in the race.

Gerry had instinctive timing and very accurate judgment of a car's pace, which is something that has to be natural in a man if he's to be a good driver. The local gendarmes got to watching the corners for him, keeping the road clear and waving him through, so he put in some nice fast work on the handy little roadster.

We covered the corners together, going through them at speed and studying them on foot. We found a wide, shallow gutter outside the falling hairpin by the railroad depot, and pulled a neat trick with that.

We calculated that if a car cut the turn close, and used the gutter to help it around, it would save the fifth of a second on the turn. Gerry all but capsized the roadster the first couple times he tried it; then he got the knack. The point about it was that one-fifth second saved on any corner meant a gain of ten yards;



multiply that by a hundred laps and it means a gain of half a mile. Gerry realized this, and worked hard over that kind of thing.

With the French cops helping, and little crowds gathering to watch, he had plenty of encouragement. Everything went well in the work over the racer and, just for a name, we booked it as the "Angeles Special." That was for his home town, and was a sort of sideways compliment to Julie.

One thing worried Gerry. He was afraid that, with her around so much, she might attract attention to herself.

"When you know a bit more about auto-racing, you'll know that every driver has a pretty girl somewhere around, keeping the others off," I told him.

"But I think there's a guy watching her!" he said, and pointed him out.

The man wore a shabby blue blouse and baggy pantaloons; he had broken shoes and one of those flat shiny-peaked caps. You can see a score of them in any French town any day, half of them with beards, like this man.

"He's just one of the crowd," I told Gerry, but I took the chance to get a closer look at him.

Under his beard, his skin was pale, and I could see no wrinkles about his eyes; the beard made him look old, but he was a young man. I got to watching for him. If Julie came to the garage, this

guy would be somewhere on the street. If she was working with a stop-watch, timing Gerry through a particular corner, the Frenchman would be about.

"He's one of those goddam secret police!" Gerry said when we talked about it again. "They're wise to her! What'll we do?"

"Tell her," I answered. "She knows more about what she's up against than we do."

We told her. "I know about him," she said.

"Who is he?" Gerry asked.

"Don't worry," she answered, and she wouldn't say any more. The man still hung around, unobtrusively—but he was always near.

TWO days before official practise started, the other cars began to arrive. I took time out to see what they were like. I'd expected them to be the way they are at Indianapolis; every man with his own car and mechanics, and the drivers as varied as the machines. It wasn't a bit like that, and they came in teams.

There were three Maserati cars, and their narrow, streamlined bodies had fresh crimson paint; air-louvres, slashed in the motor hood, cockpit sides and tail, gave them a very efficient, wicked look.

Another Italian team had three Alfa-Romeo machines, and these were painted red. They were bolder-looking, a bit higher, and the driver sat bolt upright in his cockpit; these models were Italy's best, and they were magnificently built. Their streamlining wasn't so good, but that didn't matter in this race.

I saw one of the Alfa-Romeo drivers: Tiraffi, a young fellow but almost bald, which was unusual for an Italian. He had a little, peaked nose like a wedge and square-shaped, hairy wrists and a high, giggling voice. He looked a freak, but he was auto-race champion of Italy before the war. The other Italians were older than Gerry by five or six years, but still young.

The Heinies quartered their cars in the garage of the most luxurious hotel in the town; which, apparently, had been opened up especially for the occasion, and was staffed by their own people. They had five aluminum-bodied Mercedes, whose racing history goes back for forty years; they also had three white-painted Auto-Unions, with the driver's cockpit away up in front, and the motor in the tail.



The machines looked as ready and as finished as they could be. There were about ten mechanics to each, and each team had practise models which looked as good as the cars that would race.

The German drivers were all flying-men, in uniform and very cocky. I picked out Rudy Heinkler, who had a square Aryan head, fair hair that stuck out in tufts above his temples, and gray-green eyes with a lot of cold devil in them. I saw Hans Mann, who was the Junker dandy type, delicate as a woman in the way he moved around, but with a lean nose that had a bony bridge to it, and a small chin which came up to a tight little underlip. He looked mean. . . .

The Italians didn't seem to like the Germans at all. I felt that, between them, they were going to make it one hell of a race, and I guessed that the Germans had got orders to sustain national prestige by winning. The Italians no doubt had the same orders.

Against men and machines like these I couldn't see that Gerry would have any chance, no matter how he tried. They very curious about him, and the Germans came round to our garage at curfew time, the evening before practice began.

We had just finished giving the car a white body, with a blue frame and wheels, which are America's racing colors, and she looked good. A man was just putting on Gerry's racing number: "15," as he'd been last to enter. The numerals were outlined, the way we have them at home, not left solid as they do in Europe.

I was standing there with Ledoux and the other old-timers, watching the sign-writer. Gerry was sitting on a box with Julie beside him. The crowd at the doorway melted and vanished when the Germans came up, and Rudy Heinkler led them inside. They looked almost as though they had dressed for the visit, and I believe they had, because they were so smart and finished. Heinkler clicked his heels and introduced himself and asked for Gerry.

"We come to present our compliments," he told Gerry, "and to ask if you wish assistance."

He looked at the car while he spoke, and the others looked, too. I saw Hans Mann's underlip stick out, and a smile showed while he took in the scattered tools and the grubby Frenchmen and the dirty little garage. It must all have appeared away below standard, compared with their garage and the men who worked on their cars.

"We have chemists, who would make for you any special fuel," Heinkler said. "And if, perhaps, rations are not good with you, in that we could also help." He paused, then said: "Anything we can do, please to name it."

"I think we've got all we need," Gerry told him. "Thanks just the same."

Rudy Heinkler's offer was genuine enough. Anything that we wanted was ours but that, as Julie had hinted earlier, was only because the better show Gerry put up, the more credit they'd get for beating him.

"Then permit us to wish you the most good fortune for the race." Heinkler bowed, and saluted with the others. "*Sieg heil!*" they said, and went out.

We heard them as they went away down the street, laughing to one another through the sound of the curfew bells. . . .

When the cars were flagged into first practice, next morning, I was up by the Casino bends. I wanted to see how Gerry shaped on those corners, and crowds of French people had gathered with the same idea.

Every driver was on the course, and they came from the start together. All used practice machines except Gerry; we had no second car.

I heard them thunder up the slope of the Avenue de Monte Carlo, and they hit the first turn in a bunch, all heaped together on a road that was hardly forty feet wide.

They came howling, wheel-hubs all but touching, motors roaring, gears shrilling. There were no skids, no slides. Every last man was in full control of his machine, giving his motor all it would take. The noise they made shook my chest, and the scream of their blowers drilled my brain, and I stood with my mouth open, because I knew the quality of driving needed to handle cars this way.

They slammed past, flashing red and white, the Mercédès team looking like slants of aluminum, as they pitched through and shaped at the second turn. They were out of sight when Gerry came into the road-spume and oil-smoke they left on the air. He'd started with them, but he was a long way behind.

I JOINED Ledoux and the others in our pit. We gave Gerry a chance to settle down, then clocked him over five laps. He was more than twenty seconds a lap behind the slowest of the other machines, and we flagged him in. He was savage with himself, and hopeless.

"I can't take the corners the way they do. I don't know enough!" he said.

"Listen a moment—" I began.

"People have turned out to see me do something!" he exclaimed. "I'm making fools of them, and myself too!"

"Forget the crowd!" I told him. "You're on the road for practise, not to grandstand. Now, what's wrong?"

"I'm just a hick driver, that's all!"

I took the machine out. I'd never handled it before, and I did a couple of laps until my heart stopped thumping and my nerves got tuned up. The old feeling began to come back as I drove and soon everything was slick and easy inside me, the way it used to be. I knew my bum ankle would hold up for a while.

A crimson Maserati was ahead on the slope to the Casino bends, pacing me at



Illustrated by  
Hamilton Greene

"You're not!" Julie leaned across the cockpit and pushed her pretty face at him and almost spat words. "You're a swell driver, and there's not a living, breathing wop or Heinie that you can't lick!"

"Maybe it's the car," I suggested. "Let me try it, will you?"

I didn't think it was the car. I thought it was just plain silly even to have hoped that a jalopy driver could do anything against European road-racing cracks, but

near the century mark. I tailed him into the first turn, and nearly wrecked the machine. The brakes didn't stop her the way they should have done. I had to pitch the Special into a broadside skid to slow her enough to go through the corner, and even then I took it with everything screaming, tires all but torn from their rims.

I straightened out, eased her into the next corner, then opened wide as I came from it. For two long seconds the rear



## MONACO MADNESS

wheels spun as though they were in gumbo, not gripping the road at all. When they did bite, they shot the car into a slide, and after I'd pulled her out of that I didn't try anything more.

It was the machine that was wrong, not Gerry. He'd been concentrating on getting around the course, putting the car's defects down to bad handling, blaming himself unjustly.



The road cornered hard to the right: I clipped the corner close, and the Special stayed ahead.

We'd tuned peak performance out of that big motor; we'd got so much power that the rear wheels spun under acceleration. I knew that if we could get the driving wheels to take all there was in the motor, and if we could improve the brakes, then we'd match those other machines, good though they were.

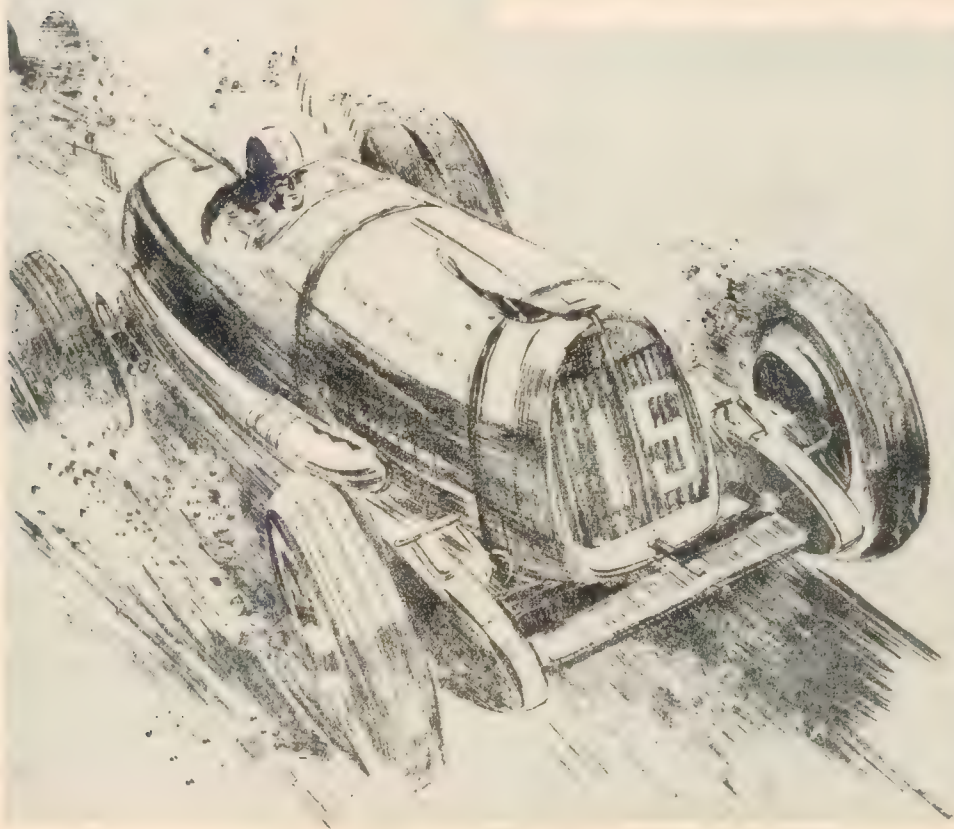
I went into a huddle with Ledoux and his buddies, Julie translating. Gerry, feeling very miserable, sat on the pit counter while the others went rocketing past, kicking road-grit at him.

"Ledoux says the only way is to give the car twin rear wheels," Julie said finally.

He meant double rear wheels, after the style of those that you see on trucks. They would make the back end heavy, but the traction of the double tires would send her out of a turn like a scalded cat. And, if the brakes were halfway right, she'd stop on a dime.

However, that meant rebuilding the whole transmission, and fitting parts which we hadn't got. I started to point this out, but the Frenchmen had gone into a huddle again. They came up with results.

Ledoux said that at Nice, not far away along the coast, they held La Turbie hill-climb every year. For this event, spe-



cially designed cars were often used. A man had entered a Bugatti with twin rear wheels for the event which had been canceled because of the war, and Ledoux believed the car was still in Nice. If we could get the transmission off it, we should be all set.

"Let's borrow a truck from the race organizers," I suggested, "and see if you can find that car!"

They lent us a truck. Ledoux went off with his gang, and I took the Special back to the garage. Gerry went with Julie to watch the practising machines on the turns and, with nothing to do, I joined them.

The little crowds of French people had disappeared by then. They were race-wise, because they'd seen events on this course, and they were disappointed in Gerry. The machines were now roaring through streets which were almost quite empty, except for Italian soldiers guarding the course.

I found Gerry and the girl by the railroad depot, where cars were diving down the slope, ripping into the hairpin. Not one of them used the gutter in the way that Gerry did.

Standing there, I saw the bearded Frenchman again. He was sitting on a baggage-truck, with his back to the wall of a depot building. The heavy smoke from his cigarette spun on the still air, and I knew that he was watching Julie.

**L**EDOUX brought the Bugatti with the twin rear wheels from Nice. I had wondered if it might do for the race, but it wasn't a Grand Prix style car. We started right away to strip out its rear end assembly, and replaced it with the Special's back axle. That fixed this hill-climb Bugatti so that Gerry could use it during two remaining days of practise.

"It's got a drilled frame and a small engine, and it's too lightly built for the course," I warned him. "But it's the best we can do."

"I'll go easy with it," he said.

His idea of going easy was to throw that machine into the turns, trying to hold the Auto-Unions and the rest of them. The car danced all over the road, but the way he handled it showed that he had plenty of nerve. . . .

The Italian organizers of the race lost interest in him. The French people figured that he didn't count now, and no more gifts came through the garage door. But, from sun-up until curfew, he was out there on the circuit, walking through

the corners after practice, going right on with the job in his own way and looking pretty grim about it.

It wasn't until late in the afternoon before the race that I was sure we would have the Special finished. I went out to tell him that, and found him with Julie down by the hairpin turn near the harbor. The road was quite flat here, and he was working out what his braking points would be.

**F**OR every corner, you have to have braking points. You pick one, which might be a street lamp, where you start braking normally; you pick another, a bush perhaps, which you use in case you want to brake later, if you're being challenged for the turn. And you select a final mark for an emergency point, the last spot at which you can start braking and not wreck the car in the turn.

"You may be able to get in a few laps with the machine before the actual start tomorrow," I told him now, "but you won't have a chance for anything more than that."

"I'll feel my way, when I get going," he said.

We walked around the course with Julie, while Gerry indicated his braking marks to me, just in case I had to take the car over, and I told him how I thought the machine would behave.

I knew that the twin rear wheels would cut down the Special's maximum speed, but that wouldn't matter on this course where the straights were few and short. He would, I was sure, be able to enter the corners very fast and be able to brake late, and I told him that the auto would kick itself out of the turns as quickly as anything else on the road.

"You know this course as well as any of them now," I said, "maybe better. I think you'll make a show, Gerry."

"It'd be grand if you could win," Julie said.

"I'll be in there trying," he promised. He had heartened up a lot and he looked at me. "Wouldn't it be swell if we could get out of here with a fistful of dough! Then, maybe, we could buy a car back home. You could tune it, and I'd drive it!"

Anything of that sort was just a dream—although I had a feeling that, with a little luck, he could go much further than I had done in auto-racing. But I also knew that an oil-spot on the road next day could throw him into a crack-up and finish everything.



We took our last walk around the course; then the curfew bells sounded from the church of St. Devote, at the foot of the Casino hill. They gave a ten-minute warning; when they sounded again, everyone had to be within the doors of this French town . . . everyone, that is, except Germans and Italians.

We walked off the course with Julie, and parted on a corner near our garage. Gerry stood, the way he always did, to watch her out of sight. I saw her cross the street; then she reached the opening of a narrow service road which led to the backs of houses.

She glanced down it; then she stopped short, and gave a sudden little scream, choking it off almost before it had started. Gerry went away on the jump, me behind him.

I saw garage entrances, and brick walls with little doors leading to the yards behind the houses. A little distance down the roadway were two S.S. men; their field-gray backs were toward us, and they had their pistols out.

Forty yards farther on, facing toward us, were two more S. S. men, and between them were a couple of men whom I guessed must be secret police. The young, bearded Frenchman was backed up near a green-painted door in one wall. The police were snarling questions at him, and they had papers in their hands.

We caught their voices as we watched, then I heard Julie breathe: "My God! Oh, my God!"

**I**N all my life I've never heard such agony and dread in a voice; her eyes were big and wide and afraid, and all the color had gone from her cheeks. Almost as if he heard, the Frenchman looked toward her, while first one of the secret police shot a question, and then the other. The Frenchman didn't answer. He stared for a moment at Julie, then things happened.

The Frenchman pitched himself sideways at the door in the wall. It crashed open, slammed shut, and he had gone.

The cops charged at it, but he must have bolted it on the inside. They yelled to the S.S. men, who spun around and raced out of the narrow road to the street, running for the front of the house into which the Frenchman had escaped. The cops followed them, one going up to the far end and the other dashing past us. For half a second, I thought of tripping this man up, but it was as well that I didn't.

They vanished into the other street. The roadway was left empty. Then the painted door opened and the Frenchman looked out.

Julie started toward him.

He lifted a hand, and she stopped dead. He jumped the width of the road, pushed open a yard-door opposite and vanished again.

"Quick!" Julie said to us. "Quick!" And we started back to the corner on which we had said good-by a few moments before.

We heard the S.S. men shouting. It sounded as though they were already inside the house from which the Frenchman had doubled back. From the corner, we had a glimpse of him again. He'd got through to the opposite street and was running like mad. He disappeared around the end of it.

"Who was he?" Gerry asked.

"Go to the garage!" Julie answered. "They'll arrest everyone on the street when they find they've lost him. I'll see you in the morning!"

She hurried away. We saw her duck into another of those narrow service roadways; then the second curfew began to ring and we went to the garage.

Presently, we heard trucks roar up. The whole block was surrounded and searched, and it was two hours before the excitement died down.

"Who was that guy?" Gerry wanted to know.

"Use your head," I said. "She knows him, and they're after him. So he's either an underground man, or a refugee like herself."

He was worried about her, but there was nothing anybody could do.

"She'll be all right," I promised him. "She's smart, is Julie."

"She's awfully smart," he agreed. "Only you've got to be more than smart to beat the crowd she's up against!" Then he said: "Boy, am I going to drive that car tomorrow!"

**T**HE Special was completed at midnight. The Frenchmen slept where they were, on the garage floor, rolled up in blankets.

At six o'clock the next morning we man-handled the machine down to the pits, and they practiced wheel-changes, in case Gerry had a pit stop, though we hoped he'd go right through without a check. Those men knew their stuff and, between them, they'd dug out all the necessary pit equipment.

Gerry came down. The barriers were still guarding the course from the last day's practice, and he tried the car.

She sounded good when he got away. He drove very carefully, giving us an "okay" each time he passed. Presently, I heard the twin exhausts roar as he put his foot down. We could see that he was fast when he went up the hill and when he came around to the hairpin turn, near the end of the lap, he looked more than just fast.

We heard his exhaust-note change as he shifted gear. We heard his brakes; then he was slashing through the hairpin and the machine seemed to pick itself off the ground as he accelerated out of the corner. It went by us with exhausts machine-gunning, and rear wheels pitching a spume of road-grit behind.

WE crowded round Ledoux's stopwatch. Gerry was just twenty seconds faster than he had been before we'd improved the Special. Just to show that it was no accident, he clipped three more seconds off his time on the next lap; then we flagged him in.

The Frenchmen were all smiles. Gerry could hardly find words to express what he thought of the car, so he shook hands with each of Ledoux's friends in turn, and his delight made them feel good.

Those gray-haired men had been working for the pleasure of it and now, for the first time, it looked as though Gerry might be able to do something in the race. I tried the car, then. It had a compact, steady feel. You could use the brakes savagely, and, when you did that, the model seemed to crouch down on the springs, slowing with never a sign of a skid. Leaving a turn, you could use all the power there was in the big motor, and the car got away faster than anything I'd ever driven.

We dusted the Special off. We laid out our gear. We paired the Stars and Stripes with the French flag on posts at either end of the pit. Then, last of all, Ledoux wired a little silk tricolor to the Special's radiator cap.

"*En avant!*" he exclaimed to Gerry, and nodded to the little flag.

We ate the grub we had, and the morning wore away. Gerry began to look for Julie, but she hadn't shown up by noon. The race was timed to start at two o'clock, and it was past one o'clock before she slipped along the sidewalk at the back of the pits. For the first time, she was without her beach bag.

"I couldn't bring anything for you today," she said. "I'm so sorry."

"We made out," I told her.

"I want to talk to you," she whispered, and moved up to the pit counter, glancing around to make sure that no one could overhear. There was only Ledoux and his friends in the pit. She fiddled with the tools on the plank.

The other cars were arriving. The pits were milling with mechanics. There was an Italian military band on the road in front of the main stand opposite; it had a section that was all red plush and gold fringe and draping Italian flags. Both ways along the street were smaller stands, but we saw that there was no one in them—nor were there any spectators on the roped-off sidewalks and corners.

"The French people aren't coming to watch the race," she said. "They think you can't do any good, Gerry."

"They're going to get a surprise," I answered.

"That's fine!" Her eyes lit up, then her tone became quick and quiet. "You remember last night?"

"Did that guy get away?" Gerry asked.

"Yes, and it's through him that I've been able to get food for you," she said. "And I've been helping him pass food to six other people who're hiding in the town." Then she added: "He says that they're to be moved on from here now, and I'm to go with them."

Gerry glanced at her. "I'm glad," he said.

"Is that fellow an underground man?" I asked her.

She nodded quietly, then spoke to Gerry. "He hoped that, with people watching the race, it would be easy for him to get us away, that's one reason why he wanted you to drive. Only now that everyone is going to stay indoors, it'll be desperately dangerous."

Gerry glanced at her again, and I leaned nearer as she pitched her voice very low, and spoke urgently to him.

"If you could look as though you might win, then the word would go around," she told him. "Everyone would come out to watch. With people moving on the streets, the refugees who're hiding can come out. The secret police won't spot them if they mingle with the crowds, and they can get away. Do you understand what I'm trying to say, Gerry?"

He nodded. "Keep talking, Julie!"

"I don't know how they're to be got away. I don't know anything except



what I've been asked to tell you," she said. "Will you try and get the lead in the race, Gerry, so that the people will come to watch? I'm not asking for myself, it's the others who matter most."

"I'll go out in front, if the car will take me there," he said.

"It will," I told him. "Only don't jump away at the start! They'll be dog-fighting with one another. Give it a few laps before you try anything."

"No, I'll go from the drop of the flag," he said. "That's the way to do this!"

"Now listen—" I began.

"The sooner he gets into the lead, the sooner word will get around and the better it will be!" Julie cut in.

"You're right," I admitted. "Only he must go easy at first, to get the feel of the car. He's hardly driven it!"

"Leave it to me!" he said.

"Gerry,"—Julie touched his arm,—"*I* shall get word near the end of the race, then I'll have to go."

"We saying good-by now, then?" he asked.

She nodded as they looked at one another. They hated the thought of parting.

"I'll drive like hell," Gerry said softly. "Only I'm going to miss you when the race is over."

"But I'll meet you for that bag of peanuts in Central Park," she promised.

**T**HE starter's flag had lifted in the one-minute signal. The cars were roaring in the line-up, their colors shining through their own smoke. Ledoux and his buddies were moving back to the pit and, everywhere, mechanics were running from the cars.

"It's all yours now, Gerry!" I yelled at the ear-vent below the edge of his helmet, and patted his back.

"What a jalopy race this has turned out to be!" I heard him laugh through the noise of his motor.

I left him to it and climbed up onto the pit counter with Julie. The last seconds ticked out in the smash of exhausts and the surging roar of fast-running motors; then the flag dropped and they were away.

In the first few yards the fifteen machines held formation, abreast across the road. Their ranks began to break as they hit the slope of the hill to the Casino, and Julie grabbed my arm. "Look!" she called. "Look!"

Through the blue haze of burned oil which they had left behind, we saw the



In the moment before the light went out, I knew him for the Frenchman.

cars all over the road, with Gerry pulling wide from the rear, using all the acceleration that the Special had, jumping other machines to get near the leaders and make it easier for himself later on. We saw him rip past half a dozen cars; then they were spilling into the first turn; we could not see them after that.

I helped Julie down into the pit. Ledoux was handling the stopwatches, two men helping him. The others started tidying up, making sure that everything was in its place. As reserve driver, I had nothing to do.

We heard the cars snarling around the back of the circuit, exhausts sobbing and howling under gear shifts. They hit the road along the shore, and the sound lifted to a tearing roar; then they were on the promenade by the harbor, pitching into the turn which brought them back to the start.

They came in a heap. Tiraffi had his Alfa-Romeo half a length in the lead. Two Germans were on his red tail, Heinkler and Mann. There was a pack of four cars bunched and scrapping behind them, with Gerry looking as if he was shaping to pass the whole lot. You could hear the drilling of his supercharger and the snarl of his exhausts through all other sound.

"He's going good!" I told Julie.

Back of him were the rest, and all the machines were so close that they used the entire width of the road, spraying grit and little stones over the front of the pits. They came with a blast of sound which hit like something solid; then they were gone, leaving a kind of stunned deafness through which their exhausts hammered back.

Next lap, Gerry was in the middle of a five-car dog-fight; ahead was Tiraffi, still scrapping for the lead with the German cracks. For three laps they came round like that, and what was happening in the corners back of the course I didn't know, but I could give a guess.

We heard them come again, thundering at the home turn. We saw the leading cracks, and out of their dust and smoke Gerry showed, clear of the dog-fight, but with the four cars that he'd beaten now chasing his tail and giving him nothing.

UP the hill, we saw him increasing his lead over the pack, going after the cracks. He was with them next time round. He cut the corner close, throwing his car level with Hans Mann. Tiraffi had run a little wide. Heinkler had his snarling Mercédès on his tail, and we saw Gerry put his foot down, hard.

He asked the big V-sixteen for all it had, and those twin rear wheels took what it gave them. The white machine leaped away from Hans Mann, slid ahead of the Mercédès, came up with Tiraffi as he straightened—then the Special was slashing grit back at the Italian.

Gerry was out in front, and Julie was squealing beside me: "Look at him! Look at him go!" He might almost have heard her, because he tipped a hand to his helmet as he passed. Then he had gone.

I think that maybe Tiraffi and the others were feeling their way into the pace for the race, going a bit harder over each lap, but not yet forcing anything. Only Gerry had jumped them for the lead, and he must have been taking a lot of chances that a driver with more experience wouldn't have risked: the sort of chances that a man takes until he discovers what a crack-up can do to him.

Anyway, he was out in front, and it must have been about this time that the grapevine in the town began to work, although the result didn't show for a bit.

The cracks wouldn't give Gerry a yard. They screamed down the harbor road at his tail, they fought him for the corner.

Once he came by with Hans Mann and the Italian at either side, riding almost wheel to wheel, with Rudy Heinkler trying to pass them all.

The dog-fighting bunch at the back had closed up a shade, almost as though they'd forgotten their individual scraps and were trying to hound Gerry down.

They stayed with him for lap after lap, until I was sweating inside the racing overalls that I'd borrowed from Ledoux, just from the strain of waiting for when they'd come round.

I didn't see how Gerry could stick that pace. I didn't see how he could know enough to hold them off. Sooner or later, I thought, they'd ride him too fast into a turn, and then he'd hit a wall—and that would be the end.

Only he kept coming. And he was always in front; sometimes by a length, sometimes by almost nothing at all, depending on what happened in that home turn. It was a nasty turn; dangerous, because it had the fastest approach on the course. . . .

Now the people were appearing from the town. They showed on balconies overlooking the road. I saw some running down a side street to the home corner. They came to the roped-off sidewalk up the hill, and began to pile into the little stands. It was as though men were going through the streets, calling them out, telling them that an American boy was licking the wops and Heinies.

GERRY must have seen those gathering crowds. They leaned off the sidewalk to wave him on. They stood up on the little stands, and you could hear them shouting through the noise of the machines which chased him.

Under that encouragement he tightened his lead. He came around ten yards ahead, twenty; then we saw a signal jerk from the Auto-Union pit. It was a black disc with a red center, mounted on a short pole. Another mechanic showed a board with "3" on it. That was the number of Hans Mann's car.

When the German came by, close behind Tiraffi and Heinkler, we saw him acknowledge the signal. He went after Gerry, flat out. He caught the two autos ahead of him, and they let him go by. Maybe they knew that he'd been told to lure Gerry into a pace that would crack his motor, or decoy him too fast into a turn.

In a couple of laps more, Mann was so close to the Special that I thought he'd



be ahead next time round, but he wasn't. Three times Gerry beat him off in the home turn and held his lead, and the pace the pair were making left the Italian and Rudy Heinkler well behind.

I followed Gerry's exhaust note all around the course, and it was different when next they came along the harbor road. It was higher in its pitch, and I knew that he was coming with the throttle pedal stamped flat. I had a glimpse of his car and the white German machine beyond the bushes, and I called, "Don't look!" to Julie. Something was going to happen on that corner, and I didn't know who would get what was coming.

The Junker had jockeyed his machine to the inside, stealing the track that Gerry always used. If he couldn't take the turn short and sharp he'd slide out and tangle with the Special, and Gerry must have realized this.

He eased his car over, pulling wide, while Mann placed his auto to take it short. We heard the brake-shoes singing in their drums, and the sound was lost as the Auto-Union's tires howled when Mann hit the turn.

His racing cords screeched beneath the strain, tearing on their rims, and he was almost through the corner when a rear tire blew.

We saw it go, and saw his car lurch. The broken tread flew back from the wheel, slashing at the Special as Gerry rode on the outside.

Mann fought his lamed machine for control, and I saw the Special swerve. I thought Gerry would side-swipe the slowing German, but he missed the car and weaved straight, then came on with the Special snaking wildly across the road.

I jumped the counter, and now the Special was slowing, coming straight at the pits. Mann came up behind, broken rubber shredding from the wheel. In the last yards, the Special dived straight at the pit-front, but Gerry stopped it just in time, and I saw that his goggles were smashed and there was blood on his face.

"Something hit me!" he gasped when I ran to him, just as Tiraffi and Heinkler came from the turn and roared by.

A CHUNK of hot rubber from the burst tire had caught him. There was a two-inch cut along the side of his cheek, and the force of the blow had half dazed him. His goggles lenses had shattered, but they hadn't splintered.

"Get fixed up. I'll take her on!" I shouted, and Ledoux helped him from the

cockpit. "Flag me in when you're all right!"

I had no goggles, no helmet, no belt to support my stomach, but I knew I wouldn't be on the course for long. If I could keep the machine going, I'd prevent the Special losing too much ground.

There was no time to think.

I FELT the squab push against my back under the tremendous acceleration; I had a glimpse of mechanics working over Mann's white car—then the Special was riding me up the hill toward the casino, and I knew that dog-fighting bunch of four cars were coming up at my tail.

I beat them on the corner, and was still ahead as the road went on through the Casino gardens. Where it started to drop, I saw crowds on a terrace, waving and urging the Special on. I cut the falling corners close, and used the gutter on the hairpin bend by the railroad depot.

There must be some kind of instinct which stays with you if you've raced a lot, and that was what helped me now. I didn't have to get myself tuned up to the speed, as you do normally before you can drive a car fast. Anyway, there were the machines behind to help me keep the throttle open.

They were very close in the dive out of the hairpin. The road ran through a great arch here, with high brick walls to trap the noise and make it deafening. Ahead, I saw the sea glistening in the sun, where the road cornered hard to the right.

I clipped the corner close. The four chased me along the shore, and tried to beat me for the home turn. We hit it in a bunch, but the Special stayed ahead. Up the hill again, they closed in, and then began the dirtiest scrap I've ever known.

They tried to balk me on the Casino bends. They crowded me on every turn, and tried to jam me into the wall before the depot hairpin. They matched me for speed, because I didn't know the tricks of the course, but for two laps I took what they gave me.

There was a silver Mercédès, a white Auto-Union and two crimson Maseratis; that is, two Germans and two Italians, and they didn't care if I got killed so long as the Special swiped a wall or went off the road and left them to carve the race up between themselves.

Well, I'd been crowded on dirt and board tracks from Rochester clear across



"Julie's traveling the same route. . . . Look out for my kid sister, will you?"

to Culver City by guys anxious to win, and there were things I'd learned. I hate dirty driving because, after all, a guy has got to get a living and it's bad to do anything which might put a man in a crack-up; the damage doesn't always end with what happens to the car itself, either. This, however, was different, and I took the man on the Mercedes when we came again to the Casino bends.

He was outside me as we went up the hill, boring over so that I would hit the curb when the corner came; that way, I'd turn over. I held my speed and we went at the turn together, with him half a length ahead. I knew he thought he could crowd me and still make the turn, and I knew that he wouldn't begin braking until I did.

I didn't use my brakes until past the emergency point, and the German stayed with me. When I knew I'd either got to put everything into the brakes or crash, I gave the pedal all I had and, as the brake-shoes bit, I whipped my front wheels out for an instant, then in again.

That's a thing at which you have to be very quick, and using the steering that way is hard to do with the wheels loaded under the brakes. But it skids your tail a yard or two, and slows the car like magic. It left me with my steering turned to take the corner, so that the Special came safely into the turn, all but clipping the Mercedes' tail as the other car went straight on.

I saw the back of the driver's head as he strained against the squab, braking with all he had. He tried to skid his machine into the corner, but I knew he couldn't make it. So, perhaps, did he.

He bounced against his safety strap as his front wheels found the curb. He bounced again when his rear wheels hit it; then he was across the sidewalk and turning sideways as he hit the Casino lawns. When tires find grass, they slide, otherwise he would have somersaulted. He went spinning round and round over the lawns and flower-beds. Red-painted wood flew as he shattered a couple of seats, and when I cleared the second of the Casino bends the Mercedes was piled up at the foot of a palm tree, its fronds shaking madly against the sky.

They had the "Come in!" signal flying when I passed the pits again, and the cars behind me had fallen away; the crack-up had shaken them. The signal meant that Gerry would take over from me next time round and, now, I did all I could to gain a bit on the leaders. I could get glimpses of them away in front at times—otherwise I had the road to myself.

Just for that lap, I pretended that I was a race-driver again, with the car in grand shape and everything coming right. The Special took me through the turns with her tires singing. I timed that gutter by the depot nicely. I had the throttle pedal flat to the floorboards





along the seashore road, and the car seemed to place itself exactly right for the home corner. I saw Gerry dropping off the plank as I came to the pits, and he shouted when I eased out of the cockpit:

"Good work! We're third, thirty seconds behind. I'll catch 'em!"

I dropped to the ground, and my bum ankle all but gave under me. I hadn't realized how much those five or six laps had taken out of it. I stood on one foot, while the rear wheels of the car slashed grit over me as Gerry went away.

I knew that for the last time in my life I'd been in a race—and I had a feeling I'd been handling the winning car.

THE crowds were dense around the course now. The race was more than half run, and on every lap Gerry pulled the leaders back by a full second. At seventy laps, he was fifteen seconds behind; then signals began to fly from other pits and the leaders opened up some more.

With twenty laps to go, Gerry was ten seconds behind. We gave him the "All-out!" signal, and left the rest to him.

The crowds were rising to him all around the course, urging him on, and at ten laps from the finish he was on Tiraffi's tail; the Italian was riding second to Rudy Heinkler, and it was then that Julie stepped close to me.

"I've got to go," she said.

She climbed up on the pit counter when she saw Gerry coming. His head lifted. She waved, her hand tipping downwards, telling him good-by. He knew what she meant, because his arm came up, caught and blown back by the wind. She watched him out of sight.

"Tell him he's been grand," she said. "He knows where to find me in New York." Her voice shook. "We'll all meet there for peanuts." She whispered as she pressed past me: "Don't watch me go!"

Just for a moment, all the blackness and the danger which lay about that sunlit town came back to me. I wondered where she was going, and how she would make out, and if we really would share a five-cent bag of peanuts in Central Park. Then she had gone—and soon Gerry was coming out of the home turn once again.

He didn't look toward the pit. He was bent at the wheel, as if he were urging the car on. The sharp, savage note of the twin exhausts came like a single gunshot as he shifted gear, closing with Tiraffi up the hill.

He was ahead of him next time round. He had only Heinkler to beat, and he could see him on the road in front. It took six laps for him to catch the Mercédès, and if Gerry was driving hard then, the German was handling his machine like a devil!

The crowds were howling, wild now. I've seen crowds let themselves go, but

these people were different. They were lifted out of their sadness and hopelessness as they urged an American boy to beat a Heinie in the most dangerous game in the world.

The women screamed and waved him on. All the feeling they had against their conquerors came out in their voices. Men shook their fists at Heinkler, and yelled for Gerry to pass him while, over in the grandstand, uniformed figures sat on their plush-covered seats and watched, not moving. Then, with a lap to go, and before their eyes, Gerry pushed the tri-color on his radiator-cap past the black swastika on the flank of the Mercedes, and went in front.

Nothing that Heinkler could do up the Avenue de Monte Carlo could bring Gerry back as they raced between the crazy crowds. He held the German whipped through all the bends and curves and turns. He kept the Special in front down the harbor road, and he was ahead at the hairpin.

His twin exhausts seemed to shout as he came to the finish. I was on the road in front of the pit, yelling with Ledoux and his buddies. Gerry touched his helmet to us, saluted the finish flag as it dropped for him, then stood on his brakes because the crowd had burst onto the course.

Women swarmed at the car, shrilling "*Vive la France!*" and "*Vive l'Americaine!*" and maybe the stony-eyed men in the stand didn't like to see that demonstration from French people whose country they had occupied.

Maybe they argued that it was only a race and didn't mean a thing. Yet the token of it seemed to mean an awful lot to the people swarming in the road.

USUALLY, after a big race, the winner is invited into the main stand, and the most important person in sight receives him and hands over whatever the car has won. But the Italians were very sore, and they didn't send for Gerry.

Soldiers tried to break up the crowds, and we got the car back to the pit. Then, presently, a man came off the stand bringing a bulky envelope; he was a shabby little man. I saw Tiraffi and Rudy Heinkler meet him. The German snatched the envelope away, and stepped to face Gerry.

"I have the honor to ask that you accept the award for the race," he said.

Gerry took the envelope, and Heinkler offered his hand.

"Permit also that I give my personal felicitations," he said. Somehow, out of uniform he seemed different, and anyway, he was acting like a gentleman.

Gerry thanked him. "I had all the luck," he answered, and then they shook hands.

Heinkler smiled, stepped back, bowed stiffly under the eyes watching from the stand, then went away, and Gerry passed the envelope over to me. It was fat with thousand-franc notes.

THE crowds were still cheering Gerry, and as the soldiers couldn't move them from the road, the Italians rang the curfew bell in the church on the hill, sounding it an hour before the proper time. Anyone caught on the streets after curfew was fined and put into the local jail for a week, so the people had to go.

The curfew meant that we, also, had to go. We collected our pit gear and got everything back to the garage just as the second curfew started to toll; we had plenty of help from the crowds. There was just time to pass five thousand francs to each of Ledoux's friends, and ten thousand to Ledoux; even after that, the envelope seemed bulky.

The curfew stopped ringing. Gerry and I were left alone with the car, and we looked together along the empty street outside.

"Julie got away?" he asked.

I told him that she had. He didn't say any more. We counted over a hundred thousand francs, a couple of thousand dollars, left in the envelope; then washed off the dirt from the race. Gerry changed back into his stained ambulance uniform and I slipped into my old overalls, then we ate what grub we had left.

Dusk was settling then. Gerry lay stretched out on a blanket, because he was very tired and his hands were still shaking from driving strain. We talked by the open doorway, with the cool evening air blowing in.

"You were better in the race than I thought you could be," I told him.

"It was mostly the car," he said, and went on: "If that French money's any good, and if we get back home with it, don't you think we could do something in this game together? I mean, you tune the car, and I drive it?"

There was nothing that I'd like better than that, and he knew it, only we didn't talk much about it. Julie was in his mind. He was worried about how she



was making out. And knowing she was gone left me with an empty feeling, too.

It got dark, and we had decided to turn in when we saw a covered Italian army truck roll up the street. It stopped outside. A man dropped off the back. He wore the uniform of an Italian officer, and he stepped sharply to an oil lamp which was burning on a box near the door. He bent over it, blowing down the glass chimney. In the moment before the light went out, I knew him for the bearded Frenchman, only his beard had disappeared. His voice came out of the dark, and he spoke English.

"If you fellows want to get out of here," he said, "climb on to the truck, and lace the canvas up behind you. Quick now!"

"Who the hell are you?" Gerry asked.

"I'm Julie's brother," he said.

We didn't argue. I shut the garage doors and we dived into the back of the truck. He went to the driver's cab, and another man in uniform behind the wheel sent it away at once. The truck was empty except for us, and we were a long way outside the town when Julie's brother climbed in from the cab.

"I thought you'd rather take a chance than be held back there for months," he said.

"Where's Julie?" Gerry asked.

"She's on her way across the Spanish frontier; that's where I'm taking you."

IT was queer, talking to him in the dark, with the truck rattling along. He said that he had spent a lot of time in Maryland but, officially, he was a Frenchman. We knew that he was doing underground work; he had more to do, he said, but not in Monte Carlo.

He'd stolen the Italian outfit and, when he'd dropped us, he was going some place else to do the same dangerous work. When we tried to thank him, he said that Gerry had helped, anyway. But for the way Gerry had attracted people to the streets, he could never have got the refugees away.

He would, he said, put us down at a path which ran off from the road. We were to follow it through hills, and across the Spanish border; the frontier patrol had been bribed. Somewhere on the path we should be met and helped in reaching our consul at Madrid.

He went back to the driver's cab then. We were halted a lot of times, because we were traveling the whole length of Italian-occupied territory, but we al-

ways went on. I couldn't sleep, expecting the truck to be stopped and searched. Nothing like that happened, and Gerry dozed in a corner, worn out.

I spent the time peering through the laced canvas at the dark countryside, or planning a racing career for Gerry, with Indianapolis crowning it.

The truck left paved highways in the small hours of the morning. We bounced over lumpy roads, and Gerry roused then. We finally hit a narrow road that was very rough, and I had glimpses of high ground. We were getting into the Pyrenees, but I guessed we were still near the coast. When the truck stopped, the sky was lightening away in the east.

WE dropped off and Julie's brother spoke to us while the truck backed quickly around.

"There's the path." We saw it, running over the steep shoulder of a great hill, bushes edging it. He shook hands with me, then turned to Gerry. "Julie was anxious that I should try and get you clear," he said. "She's traveling the same route, and I'm sure she'll try to contact you."

"We'll watch for her," Gerry said.

They shook hands. Faintly, we could see his face. "Look out for my kid sister, will you?" he asked.

"You bet!" And Gerry shook his hand again.

"I'll see you over there, sometime," Julie's brother said, and swung back to the truck. "So long!" he called.

We watched him go. The rattling of the truck died away, and all sign of it was lost in the darkness.

"He must be a swell guy," Gerry said.

We turned for the path. We had gone a little way along it when a voice called from ahead: "Gerry!" It was Julie, and she came from the gloom, slipping and sliding as she hurried down the slope.

"I waited over the hill, because I knew you'd come," she said. "I heard the truck!" Then she added: "We can go all the way together now."

From the high shoulder of the hill, I looked down into darkened France. The light of the rising sun just caught some clouds, making bars of gold far away in the sky.

I watched for a few moments, then went on.

Julie and Gerry were ahead of me along the path. They were dim in the darkness which still lay on the ground, but I could see they were hand-in-hand.



*An amusing fantasy by  
the author of "Exiles  
of Time" and "Dr. Fud-  
dle's Fingers."*

*By*  
**NELSON  
BOND**

was because its theme of dread and disaster was strangely out of keeping with the season.

It was April outside his office window; April, all green and gold and fragrant. The sun was beaming quietly on a budding, peaceful earth. Little breezes slipped deftly in the narrow crack of window (Tomlinson was susceptible to colds), tugged at Tomlinson's hair, and whispered tempting suggestions—such as, "Come away! Come away!" or, "Wander with us in the woodlands!"

But Tomlinson, with the dogged persistence of all science-fiction authors, dispelled these suggestions and set himself to the task in hand. There must be *some* way for the hero to counter the attack of those Sirian invaders. A gun that bombarded them with *gamma* rays, perhaps? But no—that would transmute them into phosphorus-men, luminous and even more deadly. . . .

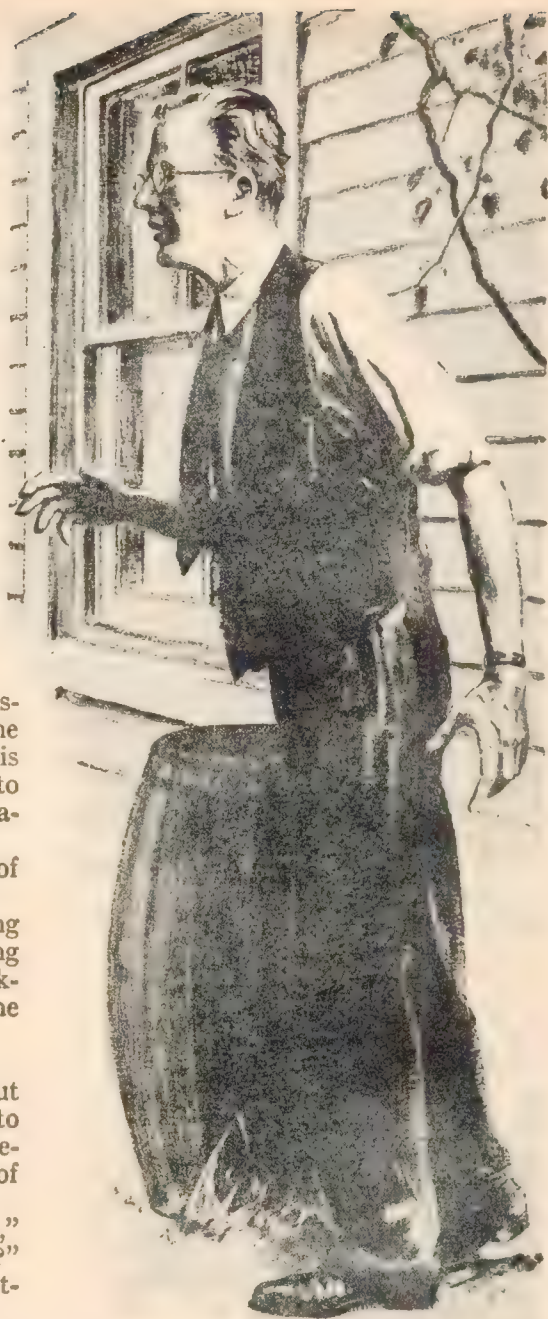
It was at this point that Tomlinson heard, for the fourth time within a quarter-hour, the clatter-banging of youthful

**T**OMLINSON was trying hard to finish his story, but it was the wrong kind of story for this time of year. There were sulphur-men from Sirius in the story—great, yellowish monsters with four legs and a terrific body-odor; and their main objectives were (1) to conquer Earth, and (2) to kidnap the heroine. But somehow Tomlinson couldn't get the story going properly. And that, perhaps,



# Mister Snow White

Illustrated by  
Charles Chickering



footsteps downstairs, and stifled, mysterious sounds from the vicinity of the kitchen. Junior again! Tomlinson, his nerves ragged, deserted the typewriter to indulge in some good old-fashioned parental wrath.

"Junior!" he bawled from the head of the stairs.

No answer for a long moment, during which Tomlinson identified the opening of the electric refrigerator, the raw clinking of a cube-box, then the closing of the refrigerator door.

"Junior!"

This time he followed his own shout down the steps, arriving just in time to see Junior, tongue firmly clenched between his teeth, dumping the contents of an ice-tray into a paper bag.

"What in the name of the Seven Saints," demanded Tomlinson, "are you doing?"

Junior said promptly, honestly: "Getting some ice, Daddy."

"I can see that! But why? This is the fourth time you've been into the kitchen for ice!"

Junior clutched the paper bag, already a bit damp, to his breast. "It's for the snow man, Daddy."

"I don't care what it's for!" began Tomlinson. "I have enough bills to pay without— *What!* For the what?"

"The snow man," repeated Junior wearily. Grown-ups, he could not help thinking, were awfully difficult sometimes. Maybe as they grew older, their brains got nearsighted, like their eyes, only they couldn't buy glasses for their

brains. "The snow man I built last winter. He's hungry."

Tomlinson closed his eyes and held them shut while he drew a long, deep breath. When he spoke, his tone was gently soothing.

"Junior, old man—suppose you go in and lie down for a few minutes; have a little nap. Daddy's going to send for the doctor—"

"Don't you feel well, Daddy?" asked Junior. And he added candidly: "You don't look so good."

"A snow man—in April!" groaned Tomlinson. "Here, Junior, do as Daddy says. Give me that bag—"

Junior sighed and relinquished the paper sack. "He won't like it, though, Daddy! He's *awful* hungry. And I told him I'd be right back with it."

Tomlinson remembered, then, something he had read in a book on child psychology. All growing children are apt to develop illogical fantasies. The best way to teach them to distinguish between truth and hallucination is quietly to point out their error. He handed the bag back.

"You take it, Junior," he said softly. "We'll go out and visit the snow man—together."

He had almost forgotten the snow man. They—he and Junior—had built it three months ago, during that record-breaking January snowfall. Tomlinson had good reason now to remember the day, because Myra, whose turn it was to entertain the Tuesday Afternoon Bridge and Backbite Club, had forbidden them to build it on the front lawn. Therefore they had built it in the small cleared space behind the garage; a spot invisible from the street or from any curious neighbor's eyes.

But it was strange that Junior should have remembered for so long a figure that must, weeks since, have melted into oblivion. Perhaps, thought Tomlinson with a curious tug of parental pride, Junior cherished the recollection because his Daddy had played so great a part in it. . . .

And then they rounded the corner; and Junior, with a tiny, apologetic murmur, left Tomlinson's side, and Tomlinson stopped stock-still in his tracks, gasping. For there, shiny-white and as firm as the day he had built it, coal-eyed and carrot-nosed, scantily clad in an old hat, a cane and sculptured buttons, stood the snow man!

And as he stared, incredulous, the snow man gravely reached out and took the proffered sack from Junior's hand, muttered, "Thank you, sonny," popped an ice-cube into his pebble-toothed mouth, and turned to grin at him.

"Hello, Maker!" said the snow man.

TOMLINSON'S knees faltered, but his brain raced at a mile-a-minute clip. It couldn't be the highball he'd had at Tanner's house last night, for that had been extremely mild. And besides, Junior saw the same thing. It might be that insanity had struck them both at the same time. Or it might be a form of mass hypnosis. But—

"I said," repeated the snow man petulantly, "Hello, Maker. I've been wondering when you were going to visit me again. Pretty scurvy treatment, if you ask me. It's damned lonely out here behind the garage, what with only that amorous old tomcat for company—"

"YOU," Tomlinson muttered faintly, "you're talking!"

"Well?" said the snow man, and crunched another ice-cube.

"You're eating!" said Tomlinson.

"Junior," said the snow man, "does your old man always act like this, or only when he uses the needle?"

"You're *alive*!" exploded Tomlinson.

"I'm not," said the snow man testily, "a mummy. Of course I'm alive!"

"Sure, he's alive, Daddy," said Junior.

"I tried to tell you, but you wouldn't listen. His name is Mr.—Mr. Snemon?"

He looked at the snow man questioningly. The snow man shook his head, and his carrot-nose wobbled. "The name," he said, "is 'Schneemann.' Herr Schnee-mann."

"A Nazi?" Tomlinson questioned suspiciously.

The snow man snorted a fine spray of hoar-frost.

"Don't be silly! If I look that stupid, it's your fault. You made me. But—" There was a certain pride in his voice. "But I *am* a pure Aryan. The cloud that carried me gathered its moisture from the headwaters of the Rhine. You'll notice the fine contours of my head. *Brachycephalic*. That is the reason—I *beg* your pardon, Maker!"

He snapped the last in a tone of startled reproach. Confused beyond measure, Tomlinson had absent-mindedly drawn a cigarette from his pocket, and even now was preparing to strike a match. Now, apologetically, he thrust both cigarette and match-box into his pocket.

"You—you'll have to forgive me," he faltered. "I guess I'm a little upset. It's rather a shock, you know. I mean seeing you here—"

Mr. Schneemann smiled condoningly. "Don't mention it. I know how you feel. Upset? Gracious, no one was *ever* more upset than I was the day I tumbled head-over-heels down to earth. Mercy me! I hardly knew my knee from my elbow. To make matters worse, you see, I couldn't very well decide, because at that time I had not yet been molded into either a knee or an elbow—I'm sorry, Maker. What did you say?"



His work began to slump.  
"Strain," thought Tomlinson.



"I said," Tomlinson told him haggardly, "migawd!"

"Quite!" said Mr. Schneemann complacently, sucking the last of the ice-cubes. Tomlinson could not escape the conviction that Mr. Schneemann looked the healthier for his meal. His coal-eyes seemed to glitter a little more brightly, his cane swung from a crooked elbow at a jaunty angle, and there was an indubitable bulge at his waistline that Tomlinson had not noticed before.

Tomlinson tried to reason it out, but it didn't make reason. The more he thought, the more unreasonable the situation became. At last, almost angrily, he said:

"I suppose, Schneemann, you know you're responsible?"

Mr. Schneemann shrugged.

"If you're going to be difficult," he said coldly, "so are you. *Quite* impossible! I must confess, I'm a trifle disappointed in you, Maker. I hadn't full

control over my faculties when you made me; I had a confused recollection of you as a—a sort of super-snow-man. Now I find you're just a warm-blooded mammal, like the tomcat—"

"I mean," interrupted Tomlinson desperately, "you can't exist! Everyone knows that life is the result of the comingling of proteids, compounds, colloidal matter. You contain none of those. You're simply a figure molded out of snow. Frozen water. Hydrogen and oxygen—"

"All right," said Mr. Schneemann a little sulkily, "so I'm all wet. So what? Snow is crystalline, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, rocks and crystals and silicates are crystalline too. You won't deny that *they're* alive. They grow! And so can I—if I want to. My goodness, you should have seen my uncle! He was a little underweight, so he rolled halfway down the Matterhorn. By the time he

reached the bottom, he weighed three and a half tons!"

"But—but speech!" wailed Tomlinson. "Rocks can't talk!"

"That," sniffed Mr. Schneemann, "is what *you* think! They're regular chatterboxes. Especially the conglomerates. They babble on like—like glaciers!"

"What do they say, Mr. Schneemann?" asked Junior.

"Run along, Junior," said the snow man. "Your old man wouldn't want me to tell you."

This was the last straw. . . . "I'm going to get rid of you right now!" Tomlinson yelled.

Tomlinson snorted savagely. "Hah! Trapped you, didn't he? You were lying! They don't say anything—"

Mr. Schneemann sighed. "Maker, you make me so mad I could melt! What would *you* say if you were a rock? Always being stepped on by humans. And with all the dogs in this neighborhood sniffing and—"

"That will do!" interrupted Tomlinson hastily. He was slowly but surely being forced to the conclusion that he was wrong and Mr. Schneemann right. There was just one thing, however, that didn't make sense—

"This weather!" he said. "You should have melted a month ago. Why, your body temperature is thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit. You can't continue to live with the sun shining like this."

Mr. Schneemann glanced petulantly at the sun. "You have something there," he confessed anxiously. "It *is* getting a little too warm for comfort. Of course this spot is well shaded. I never catch the direct rays of the sun. As for the body temperature—pah! What's *your* body temperature?"

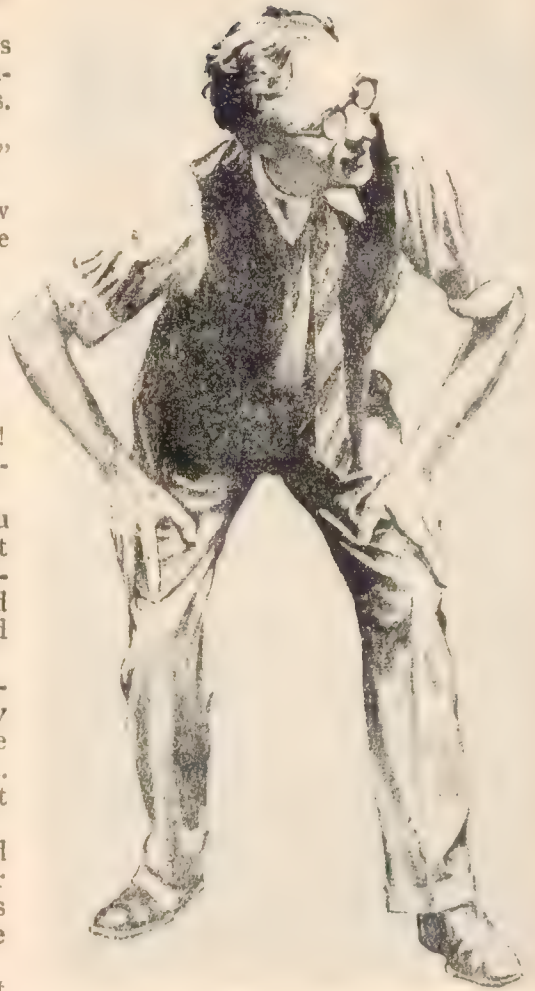
Tomlinson said, "About ninety-eight and six-tenths."

"Disgusting!" shuddered the snow man. "Nevertheless, it proves my point. *You* don't melt when the weather gets a little warmer than that, do you?"

Tomlinson passed a shaking hand across his brow. A defeated man, he stared at the snow man. He knew when he had met his match. Silently he turned toward the house.

"Don't go, Maker!" called Mr. Schneemann. "I want to talk to you!"

His cry raised a stiff, icy breeze about Tomlinson's neck and shoulders. Tomlinson sneezed and moved faster. As he



fled, he heard the voice of the snow man admonishing Junior, "Now, mind you get good solid ice, sonny! The last you got me was full of air bubbles. And it tasted like hail—"

Thus Mr. Schneemann became a recognized member of the Tomlinson household—a member recognized, however, only by Tomlinson and his son. Myra did not become a party to the secret, for obvious reasons. And though Tomlinson often considered the advisability of introducing Mr. Schneemann to some of his scientist friends, he never could force himself to the point of doing so.

His mind, the evidence of his senses, told him he had seen and talked to Mr. Schneemann. But—could he trust his mind and his senses? Tomlinson wasn't sure. He sought refuge in his encyclopedia, discovered there several anomalies that had never before occurred to him.



Under "Life" he found Herbert Spencer's calm declaration that life is the "continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations"—which most definitely did not obviate the possibility of Mr. Schneemann's existence. He also found, to his amazement, that life is as truly a property of crystalline substances as it is of organic ones—the only difference lying in the fact that crystals grow by the superficial apposition of new particles ("Those confounded ice-cubes!" thought Tomlinson) and living substance by intussusception.

HE plunged still deeper into his work. But somehow he could not get interested in the adventures of hardy young space-adventurers among the plant-men of Pluto and the taffy-men of Tethys. His work began to slump. Fan mail fell off. His editors wrote him a sharp note of query. And one of his most faithful fans, who was accustomed to awarding him at least four Brazil nuts on each story he wrote, declared that his latest effort was worth, at most, one split goober.

In his office, thinking coldly, logically he would convince himself that Mr. Schneemann was but a figment of his vivid imagination. "Strain," thought Tomlinson. "Overwork. I've been going it too hard. Perhaps my digestion—"

Then, reassured, he would stroll out behind the garage—and nine times out of ten find Mr. Schneemann standing, smiling, sucking on an ice-cube brought him by the obedient Junior, experimentally frosting the leaves of a hapless elm.

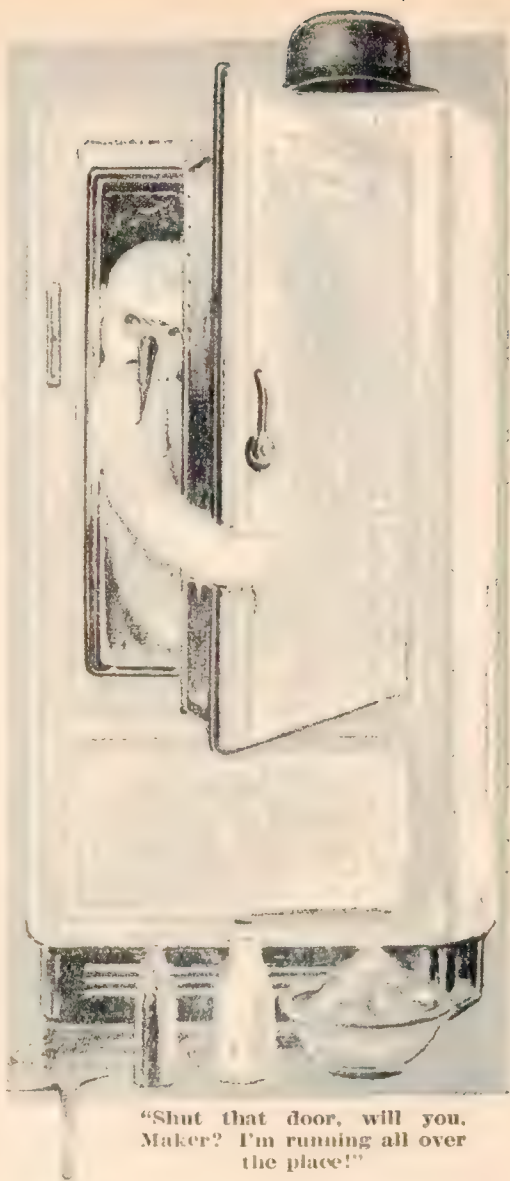
"I'm an accursed man," Tomlinson complained once, haggardly. "There's never been another freak like you in the history of the world. I have to be the first man to—"

"Stuff!" said Mr. Schneemann roundly. "And nonsense! There have been millions of us. Didn't you ever read about the Frost Giants? They were my ancestors. And the Hyperboreans were first cousins."

"Mere legend!" croaked Tomlinson. "There's never been a living snow man in recent times—"

"Are all humans," asked Mr. Schneemann plaintively, "as stupid as you? I suppose it's the inner heat that makes your mind sluggish. But of course my family has lived in fairly recent times. Once when there was a terrific blizzard in Rome—"

"In—in Rome?"



"Shut that door, will you. Maker? I'm running all over the place!"

"Ah, yes! My great-great-grandmother used to tell me about that. A terrible blizzard. We tumbled from the sky by the thousands. The streets of Rome were white with us. Scandalous city, Rome. They had just murdered their dictator, a bald little chap named Cæsar, I believe. And his friend, realizing that they couldn't give him a big funeral unless we left the city, addressed us. 'Friends, snow men, countrymen—' he said—"

"This," wailed Tomlinson, "is too much! This has to be the end!" And he fled.

But it wasn't the end. Mr. Schneemann remained, a smiling, self-satisfied guest in Tomlinson's back yard, and a menace to the size of Tomlinson's electricity bill.

Until one morning Tomlinson woke to find the sun beaming brightly into his window—woke happily to find that changeable spring had left the earth and that the warm hand of summer had come.

Myra was not home. She had gone to visit her mother. Tomlinson and Junior were alone in the house. Which is one reason why Tomlinson's pleasure vanished in a jolt of sudden fear when he heard Junior's voice raised in an agonized cry: "Daddy! Daddy! He's gone!"

Tomlinson raced into his clothes, downstairs and into the backyard. Behind the garage he found Junior, sobbing untrollably, pointing at a damp oval spot on the ground.

"He's gone, Daddy! And he didn't even say good-by!"

A great load seemed to lift from Tomlinson's mind.

"Good!" he cried. "Gone at last! Well, come along, Junior. We're going to celebrate with the biggest, joyfulest breakfast any man ever had—What's the matter, son?"

Junior bit his lip. "N-nothing, Daddy. I just had a little pain in my tummy. It—it's all right now."

Still staring mournfully back at the place where Mr. Schneemann had stood, Junior allowed himself to be persuaded into the house. The boy, thought Tomlinson, was not himself. He was strangely pale and quiet, oddly inactive. But when he'd see a nice glass of orange-juice before him—

He went to the refrigerator, pressed the handle—and frowned.

"Stuck again! I told Myra we didn't need a great big refrigerator like this. Always something getting out of order. Open up, you!"

He tugged again, harder. This time the door swung open reluctantly. And from inside came a plaintive voice:

"Shut that damned door, will you, Maker? I'm running all over the place!"

IT was Mr. Schneemann, cheek cuddled close to the cube-box, knees drawn up close to his chin for comfort, his arms wrapped around the vegetable cold-tainer. As Tomlinson watched, one of Mr. Schneemann's toes melted and dropped with a juicy *plop* onto the kitchen floor.

"If you don't mind!" said Mr. Schneemann. "Can't you see I'm suffering from heat prostration? I had to come in here for coolth."

"For," repeated Tomlinson dazedly, "coolth?"

"Heat is warmth, isn't it? Well—oh, shut the door!"

That was the last straw. Something clicked in Tomlinson's brain; a red haze danced before his eyes. And rage shook him as a college boy shakes a letter from home. "Shut the door?" he yelled. "The hell I will! I've had enough of you, Herr Schneemann. I'm going to get rid of you right now! I'm going to give you a good punch in the icicle—with *this*!"

And he moved to the stove for the kettle of boiling water he had set there. Mr. Schneemann gasped frigidly.

"No! Not that! Anything but that!"

THEN came a startling interruption. From Junior, who had been sitting, white of cheek and hollow of eye, came a frightened whimper. "Daddy! Oh, Daddy—I feel—" And he fell off the chair in a dead faint.

In a single leap Tomlinson was at Junior's side. The boy's pulse was too rapid, his cheeks pale, his mouth contorted with pain. Tomlinson loosened his son's belt, and as he did so Junior stirred from his stupor, winced, loosed a tiny moan. Tomlinson sprang to the telephone.

Dr. Newton snapped, as soon as Tomlinson described the symptoms:

"Appendicitis, Tomlinson—acute. I'll be right there with an ambulance. Put a cold pack on his abdomen until I get there—" Then he hung up.

Tomlinson brushed Mr. Schneemann's elbow roughly off the ice-box, yanked out a cube-tray, and—

"I'm sorry, Maker," said Mr. Schneemann apologetically, "I—I ate them all. This morning. I—I was hungry!"

"You ate them!" Tomlinson aged ten years in half that many seconds. "Then what are we going to do? My son—if anything happens to him—"

Then: "Get out of the way!" said Mr. Schneemann.

Laboriously he clambered out of the ice-box. As he moved into the kitchen, a warm breath of summer air stirred through the open window; a faint fog rose around Mr. Schneemann, and he shivered. But he did not hesitate. On slippery feet he moved to Junior's side, bent over and placed both hands upon the suffering boy's abdomen.

Tomlinson cried, "What are you trying to—" then stopped. For with that cool caress, Junior's labored breathing had slowed, his mouth stopped twisting and he lay still. Mr. Schneemann said simply: "Someone *had* to do something!"



## MISTER SNOW WHITE

The next ten minutes were like a nightmare to Tomlinson. The hands of the kitchen clock crept like listless shadows across the dial; the room was alive with a dreadful silence. And before his eyes as he stood there helpless, impotent, was being enacted a strange, weird drama.

Mr. Schneemann, heedless of the cold perspiration that poured off his head, his neck, his shoulders, remained with his snowy hands pressed to Junior's body. A puddle grew beneath his feet; once there was a muddy *gloop* as Mr. Schneemann's left leg fell off. The snow man turned to Tomlinson pathetically. "If you don't mind?" he said.

Tomlinson pressed the leg back into place. But it felt weak and watery beneath his fingers. It wouldn't be long, in this heat, before Mr. Schneemann—

For Mr. Schneemann's shape was sadly altered now. His hat had long since caved in over his ears; his pebble-teeth had one by one dropped from his mouth; his carrot-nose drooped, and only in his coal eyes was there any spark of intelligence. The kitchen floor was a rivulet. And from the melting ball hunkered over Junior came a thin, faint voice:

"I—I can't last much longer, Maker."

Then came a welcome sound. The sound of a siren screaming up the street, halting before the house; footsteps pounding up the walk. With a swift, decisive gesture, Tomlinson scooped up the dwarfed remains of Mr. Schneemann, crammed them recklessly into the refrigerator and slammed the door. Dr. Newton came in, cast one bewildered glance about him, and bent over his patient.

He rose finally, nodding to the orderly, who bore the youngster away, to the ambulance, to the hospital, to a swift, assured recovery.

"Quite a mess you made around here, Tomlinson," he said. "Lord, man, you must have had that icebox *filled* with ice! A good thing. It saved the boy's life. A messy first-aid—but effective."

"He'll be all right?" asked Tomlinson—his voice hoarse with anxiety.

Dr. Newton nodded comfortably.

"Perfectly. We've caught it in time. He'll be up and around again in a week or ten days—thanks to you."

"Not thanks to me," breathed Tomlinson gratefully. "Thanks to Mr. Schneemann."

"Eh? What's that?"

"Nothing," said Tomlinson. "Nothing at all, Doctor."

AFTERWARD, with the refrigerator dial turned to "Quick-Freeze," Tomlinson opened the door for a moment. Mr. Schneemann was still weak; but that he would recover, Tomlinson saw at a glance. For the snow man had devoured every container of frozen food in the box; and now, with aplomb, was remolding his somewhat bedraggled features. He smiled at Tomlinson cheerily.

"Junior all right, Maker?"

"Fine, thanks. And you?"

"A little underweight," admitted Mr. Schneemann ruefully. "And I miss that left leg. Maybe you'd build me a new one, come wintertime? And my face—I can't seem to get my nose on straight—"

Tomlinson shook his head slowly.

"You won't be here, come wintertime, Mr. Schneemann."

"Won't be—" The snow man's coal eyes bugged with horror. "You mean you're still going to pour hot water over me? Oh, please, Maker—"

"You won't be here," continued Tomlinson, "because I've made arrangements to send you somewhere else. Somewhere you'll find peace and happiness, and perhaps others of your own kind."

"I've a friend who is leaving Marcus Hook tomorrow to join the Byrd Expedition at Little America. He's promised to take you along—if you want to go. I think you'd like it there, wouldn't you?"

Mr. Schneemann's look was answer enough. There was radiance in his face as he replied: "*Like* it! Oh, Maker!"

And two great drops of water rolled down Mr. Schneemann's face. But maybe he was still melting a little.



# “The Most Daring Act”

*From Page 1 we continue this vivid story of America's War  
in North Africa.*

By CHARLES  
WELLINGTON FURLONG

TRIPOLI was then under the suzerainty of Turkey, but ruled by the Arab Bashaw, Yusuf Karamauli, murderer of his brother Hassan, and usurper of the throne of his other brother, Hamet. Thirty years later a Turkish military governor succeeded the Bashaw and these representatives of the Porte, down to the present governor, Redjed Pasha, had ruled Tripoli ever since. This was in 1904, one hundred and one years after the *Philadelphia* surrendered.

Little did I dream that in 1911, only seven years later, Italy was to make war on Turkey and the Turk was to be driven out of Tripolitania, his last foothold in Africa. Little did I dream that the quiet garden of the Turkish Club would become a shambles and the blue Castle wall at the spot Riley had pointed out, be spattered red with the blood of the unsophisticated Bedawi of the oasis, as they dropped before an Italian firing-squad.

While America, along with the maritime nations of Europe, did at first pay tribute to the Barbary rulers, as the easiest way to protect its Mediterranean commerce, *it was the first nation to stop paying*. This action resulted in severe and prolonged fighting, but increased the prestige of our young navy.

America's fight for the freedom of the Mediterranean involves three of the most heroic and dramatic military episodes in our history in which American sailors, marines and soldiers participated. In fact, it finally resulted in an American army marching on the Sahara desert, and gave birth to "The Marines' Hymn":

*From the halls of Montezuma  
To the shores of Tripoli  
We fight our country's battles  
On the land as on the sea—*

All told the *Philadelphia's* complement numbered 307 men, of which 28 were officers. Little did these unfortunate captives know of the long bondage before

them. To the crew, even that first night must have seemed endless. Their clothes pilfered by their captors, scantily clad and the garments of many of them still wet, they were put on a high, open terrace, exposed to the damp sea-winds, to shiver until sunrise. Shortly after dawn a dark-complexioned, ugly old hag, bent and rendered frightful by art, appeared. In her hand she carried a wand.

"*Bu! bu! bu! bu!*" she shrilly cried, and leering with black, beetlelike eyes at the astonished men, she struck the wand three times on the pavement, then hobbled down the ranks, uncannily peering at each man in turn. This diabolical old creature was the sorceress of the Castle. Both as an enchantress and a prophetess, she was held in the highest veneration, not only by all Tripolitans, but by the Bashaw himself. In fact, the Tripolitans told our men later, that she had predicted the capture of the *Philadelphia* and, because of her incantations, the frigate had struck the Kaliusa Reef.

THE crew were brought again before the Bashaw, who questioned them, as did several of his officers, including Commodore Lisle, a renegade Scotchman. The carpenters, blacksmiths and other mechanics amongst them were told off, and all marched to an old powder magazine off the Castle yard. This dark, smoky, floorless hole into which they were crowded was little more than a dungeon. The only thing they had to sleep on was a tattered old sail which failed to protect them from the sharp pebbles that covered the entire floor. In addition to this there was not even room enough for all to lie down at once.

It was the chilliest weather of the year. Yet they had no coverings. One of the men, William Ray, a marine, had only a shirt and trousers, and eighteen years after wrote in his journal, "For my part, the effects of my lodging on such a hard bed-



This and the other prints in this article are from Culver Service, N. Y.

The American bombardment of Tripoli.



ding are felt to this day, and, will probably be felt with increased pain, until the day of my death."

It was thirty hours before the men received a mouthful of food. Finally, toward evening, each was doled out a flat twelve-ounce loaf of coarse barley bread.

The second morning their slavery began. The carpenters, blacksmiths, cooper and sailmakers were separated into respective groups, under Turkish masters; the rest were divided into different lots. Repairs being made in the Castle, some were sent to carry stone, lime and mortar, others to different kinds of labor, as needed. "Some," says Ray, "got intoxicated on a liquor called *aqua dent*—distilled from the date and sold by the Jews—for which offense they received a severe bastinadoing."

Those of our men who had remained sober were forced to see their less abstemious shipmates thrown to the ground, face down. Two of their jailers brought out a piece of wood about four feet long, thick as a man's arm. Through two holes in the center of this hung a small loop of rope. Grabbing the victim's feet, their captors shoved them, soles up, through this loop, whereupon the two jailers, one at each end of the stick, twisted it around and around, until the poor fellow's feet were screwed tight together, and held in a horizontal position.

A third man now sat down, none too lightly, on the offender's back. Two others, each with a hard, heavy bamboo rod, three feet long and as large as a walking-stick, proceeded to beat viciously the swollen soles of the poor devil's feet. As if this were not enough, these men, writhing in agony, were then put in heavy irons for two or three days.

The prisoners were treated with some respect by the higher officers, but their management was left to ignorant keepers of low character. Treated like the commonest of slaves, they were often beaten and set at all manner of menial tasks, carrying heavy burdens on their backs or blocks of stone, and heavy casks slung from poles. Among the *Philadelphia's* crew were some Englishmen and sailors of a few other European nationalities.

At Christmas-time, the coldest season of the year, one hundred and fifty men, including Ray, the marine, were sent eastward of the town to raise the old wreck of a vessel deeply buried in the sand under water. Ray wrote: "We were almost naked, and were driven into the water up to our armpits. We had to shove the sand from the bottom and carry it in baskets to the banks. The chilling waves almost arrested the flow of life forever, and the Turks (Tripolines) seemed more barbarous than usual, beating us with their bamboos and exulting



Decatur burning the Philadelphia.

in our suffering. They kept us in the water from about sunrise until two in the afternoon before we were permitted to come out or to taste a mouthful of food for that day. They then brought us some bread and a jar of *aqua dent*. When we had snatched a short repast we were driven again into the water and kept there until sunset. We had no clothes to change but were obliged to sleep in our wet ones on the damp earth."

They were so crowded in their horrible dungeon that some were forced to sit up for want of room to lie down. Despite the hard labor each daily ration comprised only two black loaves of sour barley bread weighing about a pound apiece and about three-quarters of a gill of olive oil a day to eat with it.

Through the kindness of the Bashaw's Minister of State, Sidi Mohamed D'Gheis, Captain Bainbridge and the officers, for the first three months, fared better than the men, and were placed under the surveillance of Mr. Nissen. D'Gheis told Bainbridge that Mr. Nissen was the only Consul in Tripoli for whom he had the least respect. The officers were quartered in the house, formerly the American Consulate. When I was in Tripoli, this Arab house on the water-

front commanded a splendid view of Tripoli Harbor. It was then the home of Mr. Saunders, with whom I often dined. The ancient fortified wall of the city, formerly in front of it, had been lowered in recent years, but previously obscured its harbor view, except from the upper windows and roof.

The midshipmen were quartered upstairs. But on the third day after the surrender, one of them ran down the stairs and made a startling report to Bainbridge:

"Sir! The *Philadelphia* is moored almost under our windows!"

The officers at once ran up topside and looked out. Bainbridge rubbed his eyes. Three days ago he had left his beloved frigate a scuttled wreck hard and fast on the Kaliusa Reef. Yet there she was, moored fore and aft within two and a half cable-lengths of where they stood.

This is how it happened: Two days after the *Philadelphia* piled up on the Kaliusa Reef, a northwest gale swept across the Mediterranean, and the stern of the frigate was afloat. Seizing this opportunity, a horde of Tripolines swarmed out of the harbor, calked up her scuttlings and, with boats, cables and anchors, towed her off the reef. They also recovered from the shallow water, her anchors, guns and most of the other articles her crew had hove overboard.

Bainbridge must have cursed himself that he had not fired his frigate. The Bashaw was glad he hadn't. For now he could look down from his Castle onto the deck of the finest warship any Barbary ruler had ever possessed, and practically equal to Commodore Preble's flagship the *Constitution*, besides which Preble had but one other frigate, the *John Adams* of only twenty-eight guns. So Preble's loss was Yusuf Bashaw's gain.

BAINBRIDGE was allowed to advise Commodore Preble, by letter, of the situation and to correspond later regarding negotiations between the Bashaw and the United States, relating to potential tribute to the Bashaw and the ransom of the American prisoners. These letters, after being carefully read and inspected by the Bashaw and his Minister of State, were sealed in his presence, and transmitted to Preble through the agency of Mr. Nissen and the Danish consuls in Gibraltar, Malta and elsewhere.

When, dining at Saunders' home, my thoughts constantly reverted to courageous Cathcart, Bainbridge and the officers of the *Philadelphia*, on whose lives



and activities those old walls had looked, which had echoed their voices, their laughter, and within which they laid their plans. How willingly I would have listened could those old walls have spoken! I frequently watched Ali, the Arab servant, standing motionless in the background, except for his arms, as in rhythmic movement he pulled the cord that swung the big red punkah back and forth, back and forth, above the table, to fan into a semblance of movement the heated air of a mid-summer African night. Now and again my eyes became riveted on a bust of Washington in a wall niche at the back of the room. It was a forgotten relic of former consular days. Saunders offered it to me as a gift. Sorry now I didn't take it.

Captain Bainbridge's first letter advised Preble of the wreck of the *Philadelphia* and was quickly followed by a second, which told of her being salvaged and towed into the harbor by the Tripolitans. Most all his letters contained secret messages, written between the lines in lemon juice, which was invisible until heated.

In a letter written about a month later Bainbridge secretly told Preble that the frigate was a powerful addition to the Tripolitans, that it was impossible for men of the squadron to recapture her and tow her out under the batteries of the Castle and through the armed ships in the harbor, so recommended she be destroyed. He suggested a small merchant schooner be chartered, filled with fearless men hidden below decks, enter the harbor in disguise, then board and scuttle the frigate. Preble, who was making his base at Syracuse, later advised Bainbridge that preparations were under way to carry out these plans.

The Bashaw importuned Bainbridge to recommend to his government the payment of an exorbitant sum for the ransom of the prisoners, which Bainbridge refused to do. One day the American Captain was called before the Royal Divan and found the Bashaw in a towering rage, due to a report that Tripolitan prisoners had been roughly treated aboard the U.S. frigate *John Adams* and demanded that Bainbridge write Preble to release them. Bainbridge refused, with the result that he and his officers were removed from the Consulate and confined in three crowded rooms off the Castle courtyard, across from where their crew were imprisoned. There were a number of renegades among them, but a Swede called

Wilson was suspected of being responsible for this and other false reports, so as to curry favor with the Bashaw.

"If ever we both get back to America, or get release from captivity," Bainbridge once told Wilson in the presence of the men, "I'll have you hanged for treason." This resulted in Wilson turning Mohammedan, donning Moslem clothes, being given privileges and lording it over his comrades.

While Bainbridge tried to alleviate the condition of the crew, he and his officers were themselves now subjected to close confinement in the Castle and to insufficient and poor quality food, but they were shortly sent back to their former quarters. So the winter dragged on, but through Bainbridge's efforts some supplies were sent by Preble, the men's suffering thus alleviated from time to time and the officers even allowed to walk about town and occasionally to ride, under guard, out into the oasis to the eastward.

MEANWHILE, the American fleet kept up its blockade of Tripoli, and also captured or sank some Tripolitan cruisers and captured a number of her merchantmen. One of these was the armed ketch *Mastico*, captured by Decatur, in command of the *Enterprise*. She was commanded by a Turk, who, with two Tripoline officers and some soldiers, were on their way to Constantinople, with a cargo of slaves. The *Mastico*, which had formerly been a French gunboat, was taken to Malta. There an Italian doctor of Tripoli told Preble that the captain and the Tripolines aboard had served in the gunboats which attacked the wrecked frigate and had been particularly active in plundering the officers and crew. In fact, the *Mastico* herself had taken part in the attack on the *Philadelphia* under Tripolitan colors, but was now taken into the United States service and renamed the *Intrepid*.

One late afternoon, just before our sailors had returned to their prison, some of them sighted two vessels standing in toward Tripoli. About eleven o'clock that night they were suddenly aroused from their weary sleep by an uproar, harsh voices of men, the clattering of many footsteps through the Castle yard and the screeches of women, all mingled with the thundering of cannon from the batteries which shook their prison to its very base. The entire city was in a tumult in which they could often hear the

word "*Americanos!*" Although double guards were put at their bolted, prison-dungeon doors, hopes rose high in their hearts that some of their countrymen were coming to liberate them. If an attempt had been made it had failed, as early morning showed, for their keepers rushed in amongst them "like so many fiends . . . beating and cursing everyone . . . spitting in our faces, gnashing their teeth and hissing like dragons."

Though the crew did not know at the time the cause for all this, the officers did. Bainbridge's suggestion was being carried out. Not only Preble, but all of his young captains had mulled over it and by the end of January, the plans were completed and the men selected. Decatur, because of his headiness and daring, was chosen to command the expedition and the captured *Mastico*, now christened the U. S. ketch *Intrepid*, was to be used, disguised as a Maltese fisherman.

Aboard her was to be a picked crew of fourteen commissioned and warrant officers, twelve petty officers, twenty-eight able seamen, eight ordinary seamen, eight marines and a Sicilian pilot named Salvatore Catalano. This complement of seventy-one, all told, more than crowded the little sixty-ton craft, which five men could have easily handled.

Decatur, who had just celebrated his twenty-fifth birthday that month, was the oldest officer by a number of months of any of those aboard. The little brig *Siren*, under Lieut.-Commandant Charles Stewart, was detailed to sail in company and give what aid it could, particularly in covering the retreat of the *Intrepid*.

THE weather being favorable, under cover of darkness, the eve of February 3, the *Siren* and *Intrepid* weighed anchor from Syracuse. Preble's orders to Decatur, in brief, were, "Proceed to Tripoli in company with the *Siren*. . . Enter that harbor in the night, board the *Philadelphia*, burn her and make good your retreat with the *Intrepid*." Preble added: "The destruction of the *Philadelphia* is an object of great importance and I rely with confidence on your intrepidity and enterprise to effect it." Their run, due to bad weather which crowded them below decks, had been a most uncomfortable one, partly due to vermin which their predecessors, the slaves, had left behind.

By dark the evening of February 16th, the *Intrepid* was two miles from the eastern entrance of Tripoli Harbor. The *Siren*, disguised as a merchantman, kept

several miles behind. Approaching the coast, drifting under a starlit sky and the faint light of a new moon, the little ketch moved slowly into the harbor of Tripoli through the eastern entrance. The men went over their instructions and the final arrangements were made. Then Decatur called for attention. "Men," he said, "our watchword is '*Philadelphia!*'"

Soon, in the very innermost corner of the harbor, directly under the batteries of the harbor and the Castle, Decatur made out the dark shape of the *Philadelphia* looming against the background of the white-walled city. She was stripped of her sails; her lower yards lay on the gun-wales; her topmasts were housed, and the foremast, which Bainbridge had ordered cut away, had not been replaced. Nearby lay two large cruisers and some galleys fully manned.

Decatur and a half dozen others on deck, were disguised in Maltese dress. At the wheel Catalano, the Sicilian pilot, skillfully eased the *Intrepid* in. Over the quiet water came the faint sound of the muezzin's voice as, from the Mosque of Sidi Hamet, he intoned to the faithful the "*'eshe*," the prayer of nightfall. Within the Castle, Yusuf Karamauli, in his sumptuous apartments, was as innocent of what was about to take place as was the crew of the *Philadelphia*, crowded in their damp dungeon. Only a few lights glimmered from Tripoli town. It had locked its doors for the night, and lay, like a great white moth, in stilly whiteness on the edge of the desert.

The little ketch, with only four small guns, was now face to face, not only with the formidable force of Tripoli's batteries, mounting a total of 115 guns, but directly under those of the *Philadelphia*, which now mounted forty guns, every one of which was loaded and double-shotted. Only the occasional lazy creak of a boom, or the soft gurgle of water along the sides of the ketch broke the stillness.

BY three bells (9:30) the *Intrepid*, almost in a dead calm, was within two hundred yards of the *Philadelphia*, the center of that scene of peace and beauty.

Suddenly, a harsh voice peremptorily rang out from the frigate, "What ship is that?"

Catalano, who had already been coached by Decatur (who now stood beside him at the wheel) promptly replied in the lingua franca of the East, "The ketch *Stella* from Malta."

"Keep off, or I'll fire."





They were now directly in the range of the frigate's port battery and the slightest suspicion on the part of the commander would have seen the *Intrepid* blown to smithereens. It was necessary to play for time to enable the becalmed ketch to warp alongside the frigate.

"We lost our anchors and would like the favor of riding by you during the night."

"What vessel is that in the offing?"

Decatur whispered to Catalano, "Say it's the *Transfer*," which he knew the Tripolitans were expecting.

"The *Transfer*," replied Catalano.

"*Bono!*" said the officer.

There must not be the slightest evidence of hurry now, so the *Siren's* boat, which was in tow, was leisurely manned by Lieut. Lawrence and three men who took a hawser to make fast to the ship. She was met halfway by a boat from the *Philadelphia* with another rope. These were made fast together and each boat returned to its ship. The rope was now passed along the *Intrepid's* deck to where some of the crew lay stretched, out of sight, and who gradually hove their vessel toward the frigate. When almost alongside it, the enemy smelled a rat.

"*Americanos!*" The cry rang through the ship and all hands sprang to quarters. "*Americanos!*" echoed from shore.

"Board!" yelled Decatur.

Like Jacks from a box, the Americans poured fore and aft from the hatches.

Midshipman Morris, a mere lad, was first to board the frigate. Decatur was a close second. Following him, the Americans poured over the bulwarks onto the quarterdeck, where they quickly formed a line across it, then headed by Decatur, launched the attack. The spar deck was quickly taken, though on the lower deck, their backs to the hammock nettings, the Tripolines savagely fought back; but the lower deck also was soon cleared. Reports vary as to the number of Tripolitans. Anyway, twenty were killed, a big boatload got away, and a large number jumped overboard and swam ashore. Decatur, in his report, said: "I can form no judgment as to the number aboard. We have made one prisoner."

ONE slightly wounded man was the only casualty among the Americans. Decatur now found himself and his men in complete control of the frigate. Decatur's original idea, which he had been forced by Preble to relinquish, was to "cut out" the *Philadelphia*, that is, to tow her out of the harbor with small boats and save the frigate. For a moment, as he stood there in full possession of the beautiful vessel, the temptation to try his plan, must have been great, despite Preble's orders. It is said that Lawrence, seeing his hesitancy, remarked, "Remember, it is as dangerous to do too much, under Commodore Preble's orders, as to do too little." That decided it.

"Stand by!" he shouted to those below him in the ketch: "Pass up the combustibles."

Men at their stations in the ketch rapidly passed up these to the men aboard, each secured his quota, jumped to their stations and set fires in the gun-room berths, cockpit, berths on the berth-deck and the storerooms forward.

From outside a dull glow was seen to inflame the entire bowels of the frigate. Two eighteen-pounders, double-shotted, were dragged amidships and pointed down the main hatch—to blow the ship's bottom out. By Decatur's order, the sailors dropped quickly over the side into the ketch and got out the sweeps. The officers followed—all but Decatur, who, silhouetted against the red glare, stood by the chains to make sure of the success of his mission; then, the last to leave the ship, sprang from the *Philadelphia's* deck into the rigging of the ketch. "Cast off!" he ordered.

The whole affair had occupied a scant twenty minutes. Suddenly, a terrific succession of blasts rent great holes of fire in the darkness and seemed to tear the very night asunder. A cannonade from the Castle and shore batteries was let loose on the little ketch and the burning frigate. As the headfast of the ketch was cast off, she fell astern with her jiggersail flapping against the frigate's blazing quarter gallery, from whose ports the flames were already licking out.

UNDER the tarpaulin on deck lay their ammunition. As though by fateful coincidence the sternfast became jammed. There they were, attached firmly to the blazing frigate and under a murderous fire from the Moslem forts. There were no axes at hand, but Decatur, Lawrence and some of the other officers, with great effort, managed to cut away the hawser with their swords, and the ketch veered off just as the flames burst from her hull and licked their tongues of fire up her tar-soaked rigging. The men let go a hearty cheer.

"Stand by to give way!" ordered Decatur.

The men at the oars took a good grip on the handles and looms of the sixteen great sweeps.

"Give way together!"

The water churned as they took their stroke, and, aided by the *gibli*, the south-east desert wind, which had sprung up off the desert, the men, letting out another lusty cheer, bent to the oars, in a rhyth-

mic Navy stroke and headed for the nearby Western Passage. This was a short cut out of the harbor, through which they were safely piloted between the reefs by Catalano.

Although they were a half hour under the cannonading from the batteries and in equal danger from the port guns of the *Philadelphia* which went off as they became heated, the only damage they suffered was a shot through the upper part of their mainsail.

THE whole harbor was alight with the glare of the burning frigate whose black silhouette with glowing ports focused in a brilliant aura of gold. At this target the town and castle heavy batteries spat sharp poniards of flame. "*Boom! Boom!*" retorted the *Philadelphia's* overheated starboard batteries, ripping into the town and the shipping near by. Flames twisted up the masts and rigging, and rocketing showers of sparks shot skyward. The whole scene, like a vast fantasy, was repeated in reverse on the water, its mirrored surface broken where the Tripolines' solid shot sent up fountains of golden spray. . . .

The destruction of the *Philadelphia*, our imprisoned sailors soon learned, was not only the cause of the turmoil they heard that night, but of the brutal beatings they received next morning. The boom of heavy guns, rattle of musketry and people excitedly rushing through the street beneath the windows of the former American Consulate, had also suddenly awakened Bainbridge and his officers.

"The *Philadelphia's* afire!" cried a middy from the top floor, where, from the little window in their room, the midshipmen could glimpse the waters of the inner harbor and the lurid scene.

Rushing upstairs, the officers could just see the blazing frigate until, swinging at her cables, her hull was hidden from their view. They watched the glare in the sky; then there was the roar of the tremendous explosion when her magazine blew up. Bainbridge knew the plan he had suggested, written in lemon juice to Preble, had been successfully carried out.

Once through the Western Passage, the *Intrepid* joined the *Siren*, and they were soon running for Syracuse, where three days later, on February 19, the anxious Preble welcomed their return. It is recorded in the log of his flagship *Constitution* that "*At 10 appeared in the offing the U. S. brig Siren and the Intrepid. . . . At ½ past ten they passed through our*





BURNING OF THE FRIGATE PHILADELPHIA.

*squadron in triumph, receiving three cheers from each in passing."*

Officers and the crew of the *Intrepid* were highly commended; Catalano was promptly enlisted in our Navy as a sailing-master; and the following May, Decatur, then but a little over twenty-five years of age, became the youngest captain ever appointed in the United States Navy. When Admiral Nelson, who was then blockading Toulon, heard of this episode, he called it: "The most bold and daring act of the age."

ONE hundred years after this episode I found myself in Tripoli. Above the low-lying white city rose the flagstaffs of the consulates, the minarets of the mosques, behind it the palm fringe of the oasis and the eternal desert. There were the battlements ending on the point to the west by the Round Fort. There too was the same grim old castle, all looking just as it did to Bainbridge and Decatur a century before.

Tripoli was still under the suzerainty of Turkey; and a Turkish governor ruled it from the castle of the Bashaws. The be-fezzed, burnoused life of town and oasis, with camel, donkey and horse, streamed through its Eastern Gate, just as it had for centuries, carrying the same kind of ancient flintlock guns. In the little hole-in-the-wall shops where sat the

workers in silver and brass, sons of workers in silver and brass, I bought a scimitar, similar to that D'Gheis had presented to Bainbridge. There was the same sandy *suk* and the loading mole outside the city walls, where our American sailors had slaved. From Saunders' house, where the *Philadelphia's* officers had been incarcerated, I could look out on lateen-rigged ships of sail snugly anchored within the line of crusted reefs, which gleamed in broken yellow bands in the scintillating sapphire of the Mediterranean. Thus I found Tripoli, unspoiled, tucked in an out-of-the-world pocket of the Middle Sea.

Three miles and a half away, where the sapphire subtly purpled to the northeast, I could see the spot beneath which lay the treacherous Kaliusa Reef, on which the *Philadelphia* had grounded. Out in the harbor, in almost the identical spot where the *Philadelphia* had been burned, rode a one-funneled, barkentine-rigged vessel of the Greek navy, the *Paralos*. Near by clustered a fleet of dhow-like craft of the Greek sponge-divers, who come from the Greek Archipelago to fish off the Tripoli grounds during the summer season. The *Paralos* was detailed here as a hospital ship to care for sponge-divers suffering from the bends.

Provided with a Turkish visa, I had found my way to Tripoli for the purpose

of exploration in the Sahara, but my main objective was to discover Tripoli records relating to the *Philadelphia*, and if possible determine what eventually happened to her burned hull, and perhaps locate the wreck itself. The last seen of the frigate by Decatur, Bainbridge or any other American, was as she lay burning.

Did she sink at her moorings? Did she drift, and sink in the shallows, while the intruding water pouring through the holes made by the eight-pounders quenched the flames? Was she raised? Was she built into a barge or supply hulk? Was she broken up and cleared from the harbor?

EDGAR MACLAY, the naval historian, said that the mystery of just what happened to the *Philadelphia* was one of the moot questions of our naval history. My purpose was to try to solve it. I searched the records of the British and other consulates to no avail, delved into the *Dibriamim* (local records) of the Jewish synagogues, where I found a scant, inaccurate record of the American frigate having been burned by the Moslems.

Then I ran across an old Arab, Hadji Mohammed Gabroom, whose father had been a guard stationed at the Inner Gate the night the frigate was burned. As we sat in a small coffee-booth in the *suk*, just before one enters the Street of the Tailors, Hadji told me the story, as his father had told it to him. There is no space here for his story; but as he finished his tale, El-Ouachi, my Arab dragoman substantiated Gabroom's statement that: "Beyond the Molehead, *Arfi*," (master), "the tradition of my people says the wreck of the big American corsair lies."

Neither is there space here to tell the interesting story of my search for the wreck, diving with a *scandli* (diving stone) into the shark- and dogfish-infested waters of Tripoli Harbor; of the help given me by my friend Riley; of my discovery of the wreck, or of the work over her hull with Greek sponge-divers and machine-boats placed at my disposal through the courtesy of the officers of the *Paralos*.

Suffice it to say, I found that the night Decatur fired the *Philadelphia*, her forward and after moorings burned away and, blown by the *gibli*, which had sprung up, she drifted and sank, nearly a quarter of a mile to the north-northwest near the Molehead, by the Round Fort. Here I found her skeleton timbers in two and a half to three fathoms. For one hundred years Arab and Maltese fishermen had

looted her of metal and everything they could strip from her. Aside from a few copper nails and a remnant of copper sheeting, my principal relic secured was a solid shot from her side. Through the century this had become encased in an inch of fossilized matter. I ordered the diver to saw away on each side of the cannon ball, thus leaving two small bits of wood adhering to it. This shot is now in the Museum of the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. . . .

But speaking of the *Intrepid*, in its story lies the greatest tragedy of our entire fighting for the freedom of the Mediterranean. During the following spring and summer, Preble's activity was untiring. Aside from keeping an eye on the Bay of Tunis, he cruised from port to port, arranging for the needs of his squadron, the relief of the captives in Tripoli and planning his summer campaign.

DURING May and June, after the burning of the *Philadelphia*, the Americans had several minor encounters with Tripoli's batteries and gunboats. Altogether, Tripoli was bombarded five times; one of her batteries was silenced, and others, including those of the town and Castle, considerably damaged. Some of the Tripolitan fleet were sunk, and several of the Tripoline gunboats disabled.

The major naval attack was made against Tripoli by the entire squadron on August 3, 1804. The flotilla of American gunboats was under Somers, as senior officer, in which engagement Stephen Decatur again distinguished himself, but during which Lieut. Decatur, Stephen's brother, was the only American killed. This was Preble's last and major bombardment, perhaps stimulated by the news he had received in late spring, that Commodore Samuel Barron was coming from the United States to supersede him—news which, to Preble's chagrin, prevented him from completing the campaign he had planned. Barron was delayed in sailing and did not take over from Preble until the following September 10, 1804.

For some days Preble had been developing a plan to send a fire-ship or bomb vessel disguised as a merchantman into Tripoli Harbor to be exploded in the midst of the Bashaw's gunboats and to do as much injury as possible to both shipping and town. The little ketch *Intrepid* was the vessel chosen.

In her hold just forward of the mainmast, the *Constitution's* carpenter built



a compartment which the gunner's mate and his crew filled with fifteen thousand pounds of powder placed there in one-hundred barrels. From this powder a tube of powder was laid and connected at the other end with a fuse. On the hatch and deck just above the powder was loaded a large quantity of solid shot and kentledge, including one hundred big shells. In fact, the entire craft was turned into an enormous bomb. The tube carrying the train of powder to the fuse communicated with another room aft, filled with combustibles and splinters.

When the vessel reached her destination, this after compartment was to be set afire to prevent any Tripoline boarders from reaching the fuse, estimated to burn fifteen minutes. This would give the crew ample time to take to their two boats. One of these was a six-oared cutter from the *Constitution*; the other, of four oars, was from the *Siren*. These were the fastest rowing boats of the squadron.

No considerate commander would, under the circumstances, "order" men to such a desperate undertaking, and so volunteers were called for. As usual, these were not lacking; and young Somers, now a captain and Decatur's closest friend, volunteered to take the *Intrepid* in. Lieut. Wadsworth was his second; six men were selected from volunteers aboard the *Constitution*, and four from the *Nautilus*. Lieut. Joseph Israel, of the *Constitution*, who had just received his lieutenantcy, was the only other officer, and was taken aboard at the last minute.

THEY were to take the short-cut, by way of the western entrance, which, with half a fair breeze, would bring them quickly into the innermost pocket of the harbor. On September 4 a light breeze from the east was just right to go in. So, about nine-thirty, just the time when the *Intrepid* had entered Tripoli Harbor from the east, under Decatur, the *Intrepid* approached the western entrance, parting company with her convoy, the brig *Argus* and schooners *Vixen* and *Nautilus*. They were to lie off just outside the reefs to pick up the men from the returning boats.

The night was dark; everything was favorable to their purpose, except that three Tripolitan gunboats had been observed earlier, anchored a little way within the Western Passage. Those on the supporting vessels wished the *Intrepid*



From an old drawing loaned by the Somers family.

good luck; then the heroic little band and their ketch were swallowed up in the darkness.

Seconds that seemed like minutes, minutes that seemed almost like hours, dragged slowly by. Suddenly there was a blinding flash, followed by a great fan of flame, and fire burst from the water. It seemed to split the darkness and illumine the entire waterfront of the city. Instantaneously came a great booming roar, which made their rigging hum. Drums beat to quarters in the town; batteries were discharged. Splinters, spars, masts and fragments of burning sail and rigging, sparks and balls of fire shot up into the night, then like quivering fiery serpents dropped back into the sea—went out. Black night again. Silence. Their mission was finished.

The convoys moved in nearer to the Western Passage and waited to pick up the *Intrepid's* boats. Within fifteen minutes they would hail them, and soon be running back to report to the flagship, to receive cheers from the ship's company and commendations from Preble. They listened intently for the hail of the watchword, but none came. A half-hour, an hour passed. The three vessels hovered about the entrance until sunrise, keeping a sharp lookout for the *Intrepid's* boats, which never came. No one ever knew what happened.

So ended a heroic failure which will remain an unsolved mystery on the escutcheon of the American Navy. A new plan was now evolved by Captain William Eaton, at Tunis, to bring the Bashaw of Tripoli to terms and free the American prisoners from slavery.

Another episode of our War in North Africa will be presented by Colonel Furlong in an early issue.



## Anything More?

### *The Story Thus Far:*

**I**T aint what happens," said Shep Reeves to his partner Ted Phillips on the banana plantation. "It's what *might* happen that counts. You'll feel better when we steam for Colón on leave."

Shep was right. For in Colón the fruit-company manager asked them to undertake a job of intelligence work on behalf of the government as well as the fruit company, though neither would acknowledge it—or help them out if they got into trouble. Foreign agents, presumably Nazi, were developing banana plantations in the neighboring country of Parador; and there was strong evidence

that their investment was more political than commercial. Ted and Shep were to pose as entomologists making museum collections, and find out just what was happening in Parador.

They found out, though there was a delay while Ted recovered from a fever in the hospital—and fell in love with his pretty American nurse Martha Evans. She too came to be interested in Parador, for her next patient was wealthy old Don Miguel Ferrara, a leader of the anti-government faction in Parador. And when thanks to insulin he got on his feet again, he engaged her to instruct those who were to care for him on his big hacienda.

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*Happen*

By  
F. DRACO

Soon after Ted and Shep arrived on their mission in Parador, a German named Reiser questioned them all too curiously about their bug-hunting activities. And one evening soon afterward as they were sitting in a little rural tavern, a fight started and the lights went out. When they came on again, the police had arrived—and Ted was arrested for the murder of a man who lay dead on the floor. Obviously “framed,” Ted and Shep presently found themselves in a chain-gang working on the roads. . . .

So it happened that Martha Evans, driving up a mountain road with Don Miguel and his party, was horrified to

recognize a tattoo mark on the bare shoulder of a convict in a road-gang.

Ted and Shep contrived to escape, and aided by a little old Indian woman named Shira, made their way to the city and joined the Loyalist army in its attack on the revolutionary forces of Don Miguel. More, intrepid little Shira slipped through the lines with a note from Ted to Martha Evans at Don Miguel's hacienda, and brought back her reassuring response. (*The story continues in detail:*)

**THEY** crossed the bridge. This was the Indian quarter, and the houses were little more than huts. Here some

shells had fallen during the attack two days before. It was evident that the shells had been small ones, since the damage was nowhere extensive; but occasionally they saw a family poking away in the ruins of their hovel, trying to retrieve some small belonging out of their little horde, and wearing on their faces the ferocious scowl which is the Indian expression of grief. Haphazard byproduct of war, they reminded Ted of a little colony of ants busy around a hill which had been crushed by a casual and unknowing foot.

On this side of town too there was a little church, mean and low, with clear windows instead of stained glass, and no bells in its tower. The Indian women who went into it had no *mantas*, but they had left off their big felt hats, and pulled their shawls over their heads in imitation of the señoras.

"WE will go to mass here," Ted said, and went up the two broad shallow steps, and entered.

José followed reluctantly. He revenged himself on his quarter of Indian blood by affecting to despise all Indians. He did not see why the Teniente, who was plainly a gentleman, should go all the way across town to enter the poorest church; but on the other hand all gringos were madmen, and there was nothing José could do about it.

Ted knelt with the rest, and surreptitiously looked over the congregation to see if he could find Shira; but though there were many who resembled her, she was not there. He felt sure he could not mistake her red calico skirt with the bands of bedraggled blue and green around the bottom, nor the homespun poncho in magenta and orange which she wore thrown around her shoulders.

At the end of the service three pine coffins were carried up the aisle. On inquiring, Ted was told that these were accidental victims of Friday's shell-fire. The information shocked him back to reality. Events of the last few days had seemed so fantastic that he had been inwardly taking the whole revolution as a joke. But it was not a joke. It was a toy war, perhaps; but these people were just as dead as if it had been a big one. They were dead; and in their death, only the church treated them with any consideration, gave any importance to their lives or any dignity to their ending.

Ted came out again into the sunshine filled with disappointment. For some

reason he had been sure that he would find Shira in that church, and he felt absurdly depressed that he had not done so.

José was stirred into one of his rare attempts at self-expression. "Me, I am a radical. Every now and then the Government closes the churches, but the people do not like it, and they have to open them up again. People are silly."

"You can't be a radical and not believe in the intelligence of the people," said Ted. "I think the people show good sense."

This was over José's head, and he grinned rather foolishly. He had accepted his socialism in an unquestioning spirit, and it made him uncomfortable to have it analyzed.

"You went to mass yourself, this morning," Ted continued.

"But of course, Teniente; when they are open, it is better to go."

They had crossed back over the bridge and were in front of the monastery when Ted saw Shira; but instead of coming up to him, she turned and scuttled away. He hurried after her, calling, but when she did not stop, he ran and caught her arm.

Shira looked at him as if he were a stranger. She recognized him perfectly, but now he was not her boy any longer. He had become an officer. Pepe had not had any friends who were officers. No good ever came to people like her when they talked with officers or rich people.

"Shira, don't tell me you don't know me just because I've had a shave. You do know me, don't you?"

Shira nodded.

"Well, then, what's the matter? Are you angry because we went off without you yesterday?"

Shira shook her head.

"We had to, you know. The Colonel would have been very angry if we had not. There is a war on—we had to fire the guns."

"Sure," said Shira.

TED had a flash of inspiration. "Listen. It's just my clothes that are different. Me, I'm just the same inside of them. Pepe told me to take care of you, and I'm going to do it. You are my mother."

Shira scowled at him ferociously. For the second time since he had known her, he saw one reluctant tear squeeze itself out of her eye and down her furrowed cheek. He seized his advantage.



"Come along, now. First we are going to a *cantina* and get a square meal."

José, always obedient, found a *cantina* which was not too clean for Shira and not too dirty for Ted, shrugging like one who has no business questioning any vagary. In the same spirit he joined them for lunch.

Under the influence of a good *arroz con pollo* and a cheap native wine, Shira thawed out. It was probably the best and largest meal she had ever eaten all at once, if one excepted the feasts which went with weddings and funerals, and which had to be saved up for by fasting before and after. Plainly, Ted felt that he was still her boy. Well, it was a fine thing to have a boy so bright that he got to be an officer. Pepe was bright too. He might have been an officer by this time. Everything was going to be all right.

After lunch Ted gave José two *suces* and told him to find a room for her. She went off, giggling and slightly tight, and Ted returned alone to the barracks to find Shep Reeves and the Colonel—the latter in a fury because his invitation to lunch had been disregarded by an inferior officer. Genuinely conscience-stricken at his forgetfulness, Ted apologized profusely and—though it was hard for him to speak of it—told the story of Pepe's death to explain the responsibility he felt for Shira. The Colonel heard him out, then rose and offered his hand.

"I understand perfectly. A debt of honor. We will say no more about it." He continued reflectively: "It is not at all true what some people say, that none of the North Americans are gentlemen. I have been to school there, and I know."

SHEP nodded sagely, as though this somewhat backhanded compliment met with his entire approval. To be clean, to wear fresh clothes, to eat well, to smoke cigarettes whenever he liked, these were pleasures, Shep felt, that were insufficiently appreciated.

He sat on the balcony in the sunshine, looking like a complacent Buddha. When his postprandial cigarette was finished, he took his feet down off the railing with a sigh.

"Colonel," he said, "I hate to bring it up. But with your permission, I'll call my company together. We need more practice."

The Colonel was enchanted at seeing his American friend so devoted to duty. By all means, let the men be called. They could forgo their siestas; they had

had the morning to themselves. The Colonel himself must attend to other matters, but he was in fullest sympathy with the efforts of Captain Reeves. Parador would be forever grateful.

Shep sighed again, and heaved his stocky body out of his chair.

"Come along, fella," he said to Ted; "I guess the war's still on."

## Chapter Seventeen

DON MIGUEL had established his headquarters in the house of a small farmer about a mile from the edge of town. The farmer had fled with his wife and children at approach of the revolutionary army, leaving cattle and chickens and pigs like a gift of God to the soldiers, and a three-room house, furnished with iron bedsteads and chairs made of cattle-horns and leather, for the comfort of their leader. Late on Sunday afternoon Don Miguel was sitting in one of the rooms, his maps spread out on a well-scrubbed deal table, studying his reports and his position.

He was well satisfied with the progress of the revolution, so far: Under the leadership of Don Jaime, his forces were holding the principal seaport, and his advance on the capital had met with no serious resistance. The fighting on Friday had accomplished its object, which was to secure his hold on the railway, and had done so with very few losses. He held Bolto now virtually cut off from communication with the outside world, and every cartridge the defenders fired was at present irreplaceable, while his own sources of supply were open.

Nevertheless it did not suit him to wait there for a long time and let economic strangulation deliver the city into his hands. In the first place, it was too expensive; and in the second place, the temperament of his soldiers was not adapted to a strategy of cautious waiting. If they sat around long in idleness, they would have time to wonder why they were there, and there was no telling to what lengths disaffection would run. It irked him very much already that he had not been able to follow up his attack on the Saturday, but certain vital supplies had not arrived, and he had reluctantly decided to wait for them in order to strike a really decisive blow which would end things once and for all.

Just before the sun finally sank behind the distant avenue of snow-capped vol-

canoes, Pedro came in, silently as usual, carrying an oil lamp which he set on the table.

"You met him, Pedro?" asked Don Miguel, and his voice was sharper than usual. "You brought him with you?"

"He is here, *Patrón*. He is washing."

Don Miguel looked as though he would like to ask something further, and was restraining himself. He sat very erect, in a kind of alert immobility.

"I will bring him," said Pedro, and went out again.

The sunlight crept out of the room, and the warm yellow glow of the lamp filled it. It was quite dark when Pedro came back, followed by the enormous bulk of Herr Reiser. The German had to bend his head to enter the low doorway, and when at Don Miguel's invitation he sat down, the curved horns which supported the chair creaked alarmingly. He wore a light gray suit, pearl gray suede shoes with rubber soles, and a monocle fitted over one steel gray eye; his longish hair was brushed until it fitted to his scalp like paper; and sitting opposite the fragile Don, he looked amazingly healthy and well fed. The old gentleman greeted him with extreme cordiality, but there fell a restraint over their conversation, as though questions were not being asked on one side, and information not being volunteered on the other.

THEY spoke of the action at Maladon, which Reiser praised in flowery terms, and of the successful approach to Bolto. Don Miguel allowed the pauses in the conversation to grow longer and longer, as though giving his companion every opportunity to tell him something, but nothing came. Herr Reiser inquired as to the morale of the revolutionary troops, and was told that it was excellent.

"I hear," he said, "that those Americans who were in the prison camp made their way into Bolto yesterday, and have some knowledge of machine-guns."

"So my spies inform me," answered Don Miguel.

"They may some trouble make."

"They cannot cause me much. A machine-gun cannot fire without cartridges, and I understand that the supply in the city is very limited."

"With your ammunition it is well?"

"You should be able to answer that for me, with the train which you dispatched yesterday from Bolto."

Herr Reiser did not reply directly, but went back to the subject of the Ameri-

cans, speculating as to how they could have escaped, and whether they could have sent any word to their company.

"Impossible," said Don Miguel, "for I control the telegraph. I cannot consider them very important enemies, when I can count upon your friendship."

IN the pause which followed this remark, Pedro brought a dish of beans and tomatoes and a bottle of native wine; and Don Miguel invited his visitor to join him in dinner, with appropriate comments on the frugality of a soldier in the field. Herr Reiser ate; but as time went on, he looked more and more ill at ease. Don Miguel watched him with intense keenness, and drummed once or twice on the table with his thin white fingers, but permitted no other sign of annoyance to escape him. When dinner was over, however, he leaned back in his chair, gave the German a look as keen and direct as the flash of a sword, and spoke incisively.

"We have sparred long enough, my friend. Will you have the goodness to tell me, if you know, why the train containing the ammunition and the guns has not arrived, according to plan?"

Herr Reiser flushed, and looked uncomfortable.

"The European situation you have followed?"

"I know that you nations are muttering at each other as usual."

"It is serious, Excellence; of the situation the High Command takes a gloomy view. These weeks may be the last of peace. I am being with you very frank."

"When we have our little matter arranged, you may count on the assistance of my government on this side of the world."

Herr Reiser smiled as though he did not think that this assistance would amount to much.

"First matters first, is the rule when events press."

"I quite understand. It is to your interest to have our revolution prosecuted with all energy so as to be quickly finished and leave your hands free for other things. I think I can promise you that a day or two after the arrival of that train will see the end of it, and peace restored except for a mopping-up which we can do without assistance. Once a government is *de facto* in this country, one has little difficulty in getting it recognized. Large numbers of citizens will hasten to join up with the winner, for that will promise them the most security."





"I meant not exactly that," said Herr Reiser ponderously.

Again the silence prolonged itself uncomfortably. It was Don Miguel who broke it, and his voice was gentle.

"I am afraid you are trying to tell me something very unpleasant, señor."

"Too much so, I hope it is not. May I be sure that we are alone?"

Don Miguel spoke to the sentry and closed the door. He crossed again to the window and looked out, and his dark cloak streamed like a shadow behind him as he walked. His movements were direct and quick and sure, and there was nothing about him except his face to show that he was an old man.

"And now, Señor Reiser," he said in a voice like melted honey, "may I have the truth at once?"

"It is so I will speak to you, hiding nothing. You too are a practical man; you know necessity when you see it. By enemies my country is encircled. All his

"Very well, I shall come with you," said Don Miguel. The German looked at him blankly. He had expected anything except this smiling acceptance.

strength our leader needs. We must sacrifice many interests to reach our goal."

"I see," said Don Miguel, and if a feather had been held in front of his lips, it would not have been stirred by the breath which came out of him.

Herr Reiser got to his feet, snapped his heels together, and saluted briskly.

"Excellence, yesterday I have orders not to unload that ship which docked with the arms. To the Fatherland she must go back as soon as she refuels. Tonight she will be ready; I am to join her and go."

"So you abandon us!" murmured Don Miguel.

"Excellence," said Herr Reiser, standing very stiff and straight, "I serve my Fatherland."

"And your promises?"

"The good of the Fatherland is my law: what is good for Germany, is good."

"And what will we do, now that your support is so suddenly withdrawn?"

"My hope it is that you will succeed. If you think that is impossible, I have a plan made."

"Ah, you have planned for our failure as well?"

"Yes. My plane is here; my pilot keeps it warmed up. Come with me—I put you on the *Seawolf*; safe-conduct to Germany I will guarantee, and a warm welcome there."

"Have you forgotten that the port of Maladon is in my hands, and that I might telegraph the authorities not to allow the *Seawolf* to sail?"

"Excellence, you will excuse me, but I have been obliged to think of that too. She has already sailed. My radio tells me this before I land. At the mouth of the river she is lying, and my amphibian plane drops me there. Nothing can get there to stop her so quickly as I can."

"Still, there are hot-headed young men who might try."

"Excellence, the *Seawolf* looks like a merchant ship, but to be a raider she is well prepared."

Don Miguel sat very quietly, and looked with a gentle weary sadness at the big man looming over him.

"You have thought of everything, it appears."

"That one must do if all must move according to plan." Reiser relaxed his military bearing, and spoke urgently, almost pleadingly: "This thing I have not liked to tell you. For Your Excellence I have a great admiration . . . I should have left tonight, but I wish to explain all to you, and to ask you to come with me. I must answer for my every minute. Believe me, I take a great personal risk in coming here."

DON MIGUEL continued to look at him, without moving from his chair. "That is true," he said softly. "You have taken a great personal risk."

Herr Reiser looked at his wrist-watch.

"No more is to say," he announced. "I must to my plane return; in half-hour at the latest we leave. You are coming?"

Don Miguel smiled. "You do not give me much time."

"Pardon, Excellence. But time lacks."

Don Miguel's fingers beat a swift tattoo on the table. He rose from his chair, still smiling, and gave a little sigh.

"Very well. I shall come with you," he said softly; and taking his wide black hat from a hook in the corner, put it on his head.

The German looked at him blankly. He had expected an argument, an unpleasant scene, anything except this smiling acceptance. It seemed altogether too cavalier, too facile a desertion of a cause. It was sensible, he reminded himself. One could not hope to understand the Latin-Americans. They were calm when one expected excitement, and excited when one expected calm, and their loyalties were inexplicable; but one thing he had learned: they had a very practical side. He shrugged. He was glad now that he had given the old man a chance, but somehow sorry that he had taken it. He bowed again, stiffly, and opened the door. Don Miguel placed his hat upon his head and passed, muffled in his long black cloak, into the darkness of the corridor.

AS they stepped out of the house into the night that lay under the stars, Pedro appeared from nowhere, and Don Miguel spoke to him in Quechua, a language which Herr Reiser had neglected to learn. He disappeared again in the darkness, and Reiser and the Don turned into the road.

"Excellence, if you would please to take a car, down this road is a mile to my plane."

"I shall enjoy walking."

"Excellence, if you please to say good-by to anyone, or collect anything for the journey, I could the time make."

"I have no farewells to say. Pedro will meet me with all that is needed."

They walked a few moments in silence. "It is sad to me to leave Parador," said Reiser. "I had grown fond of it."

"I too shall be sorry when I leave it."

"Of course, Excellence; that is understood; to you it means more than to me. But I am sorry, nevertheless."

Don Miguel seemed suddenly disposed to conversation.

"In my place, Señor Reiser, would you go?"

They were passing a little grove of eucalyptus trees, and Reiser stopped a moment in astonishment.

"Who can say, Excellence? It is the wise thing—the safe thing. You have good reasons."

"Good reasons for deserting my people, my country? Good reasons for running away? What sort of reasons would those be?" Don Miguel persisted.



Reiser felt annoyed at what he took for a sign of vacillation, and for the delay which such an attitude might cause.

"Your Excellence knows best his danger," he answered curtly. "Here our path grows rough. If you will please to lean upon my arm, we can go faster."

"You have plenty of time," said Don Miguel, in a voice which sounded as though he were speaking to a sweetheart.

**H**ERR REISER did not think so, but he tried to control himself. He hadn't allowed for the delay of walking back, but under the circumstances it seemed most ungenerous to hurry the old man. In the distance he could hear the smooth roaring of his airplane. Hans, stout fellow, could always be depended on to carry out his orders to the letter. It would be a relief to get on board and feel the plane lift smoothly over the mountains. He was glad that he had thought to provide a passport for the old Don, although he had not really expected him to come. It was always wise to prepare for every contingency. Foresight won the battles in the end—foresight and coordination.

Just then the motors gurgled, stopped. The sudden silence roared in his ears like thunder.

"*Donnerwetter!*" he exclaimed. "What is that?"

He would have run forward, but a hand, no heavier than a child's, yet strangely strong and insistent, was laid on his arm, and a soft voice said: "Wait."

"Pardon, Excellence. Something with the motor is wrong."

"No. Wait. The motors are all right. The trouble is with the pilot."

"No, Excellence. I know Hans. He would answer with his life."

"Yes," said Don Miguel.

That single syllable was so soft, and yet so sinister, that in spite of himself Reiser stood staring into the darkness, trying to see the face of the man at his side. Between the black hat and the black cloak, the Don's features were only a white blur in the starlight; but the voice, though still low, was terribly distinct; and for the first time in his life, the big German felt a chill of fear.

"You are stupid, Reiser. I have always suspected it, and now I see that it is true. You are stupid because you do not know, and you cannot understand how other people are going to act. Did you really think that I would run away, desert the people who have been fighting for

me, and leave my country? I am different from you. My Fatherland might ask my life, but it would never ask my honor. We do not run away. . . . Do not move. When you move, even a hair's-breadth, you are a dead man. I am old, and it is true that I must leave Parador all too soon, but you will leave it before I do."

"Excellence," said Reiser, "you do not dare to harm me."

The man in the darkness laughed softly, and that was the most frightening sound Reiser had ever heard.

"I must tell you something, although it is too late to be much use to you: When you trifle, do not trifle with old men. They have nothing to lose."

Reiser made a last desperate grab for the Luger in his shoulder-holster. Fire flashed in the night. There was a silencer on the Don's gun, and it made no more noise than a handclap. Reiser fell, and his heavy pistol thudded to the ground just before him. The Don bent over and put one more bullet through his head, aiming carefully, with a hand as steady as a young man's. A shadow detached itself from the trees and bent over the prostrate body.

"Pedro?"

"Yes, *Patrón*. He is dead. The pilot too."

"Good. Let them be buried at once And Pedro—"

"Yes, *Patrón*."

"See that the men who dig the graves are in the front of the attack tomorrow morning. I go back to prepare everything: we will move forward at dawn."

"Will you take my horse?"

"No. I will return on foot. It is quieter."

"Yes, *Patrón*."

## Chapter Eighteen

**S**HEP'S persistence moved the machine-gun company into the old monastery on Sunday evening. With that implacable patience of his, he pointed out over and over that an attack to get into the town must come from a point outside it, and that the most vulnerable point was the side exposed to the plain. The Colonel admitted all that, and had no intention of leaving the bridge unguarded, but he liked reserving his shiny new guns for the defense of the government buildings themselves.

"We'll leave two here, with Teniente Moreno," said Shep at last, "and Ten-

iente Phillips and I will take the other four to the monastery."

Since the American was evidently prepared to argue all night, and disarrange all the plans for the evening unless he got his way, the Colonel at last gave in to him. Darkness had begun to fall before they started to move, and they installed themselves in the building by the glimmer of flashlights. Shep would not allow candles or lamps to be used for fear that a steady light inside the old walls would show their position to the enemy.

"Can't say why I'm so keen on doing you and myself out of a bed," he grumbled to Ted. "I apologize, but I've got a feeling that here is where we belong. Call it a hunch if you want to."

As Ted had told him about the strategic position of St. Augustine in the first place, there were no objections to overcome. They rolled themselves in blankets, lay down on the stone floor, and slept better than they had expected to. It was Tomas, who dozed like a cat with one ear always open for strange sounds, who first heard the noise of movement, and shook Shep awake.

"CAPITAN CHIP! Men are marching. Many of them."

Shep rolled himself in one movement to a loophole. It was less intensely black than at midnight, but still too dark to see far. He could just distinguish the near end of the bridge, and the sentry there, resting the butt of his rifle on the ground. His trained ears, however, caught a faint but growing jumble of small sounds. Tomas was right: an army marched on the city.

He woke Ted and the men, got the guns into position at the loopholes, sent José to report to the Colonel and ask for reinforcements. All this took only a moment, and a moment later the first fire flashed out of the darkness, and the sentry on the end of the bridge crumpled up like a heap of old clothes.

The men wanted to fire at once, but Shep restrained them until running figures burst out of the obscurity. Then the guns rattled and the enemy fell before they could reach the end of the bridge. It was Ted's first taste of the terrible impersonality of modern warfare. There seemed no connection between the mechanical movements he made and the men who appeared to trip over nothing and fling themselves in heaps, staring with surprised contorted faces. After

the first tense excitement Shep managed to cut his bursts down to seven or eight, and steadied the men to more accurate fire.

The enemy came on, wave after wave of them, the stars faded, the quick dawn lit everything with its revealing gleam, and the machine-guns grew so hot that they fired prematurely and buckets of water had to be poured on the breeches.

"Um-um," grunted Shep. "He sure does believe in expendables."

The streets were full of noise now, full of fighting. Some men had cut through the deadly hail of the machine-guns, and been met in the town by the soldiers from the barracks, running with their tunics still unbuttoned, their rifles in their hands. Far up the arroyo, out of range, a large detachment had scrambled down one side and were climbing up the other, and along the rim a few government soldiers and a large body of citizens, armed with anything they could pick up, were beating them back.

The attack had been carefully planned. As the fighting was at its hottest, many revolutionary soldiers, who had been sent around through the hills under cover of darkness, poured down the mountains on the other side of town, and finding no one to stop them, roared through the city to the barracks themselves. Lieutenant Moreno and his two machine-guns did valiant service in holding them until some of the government forces could get back from the hot fighting around the bridge, but before help came, he died there, and so did most of his men.

The pride of Don Miguel's army was a seventy-five, with which he attempted to bombard the monastery. The first shell fell in the arroyo and exploded without doing much damage. The second fell on a group of low houses across the street. One moment they were there, then a cloud of smoke hid them entirely. It drifted across the street and into the faces of the men at the loopholes, making them cough. When the smoke cleared away, they saw only a heap of rubbish where the homes had been, and a brass bedstead, neatly covered in white, sitting on the top of it.

A THIRD shell knocked a corner off the top of the building, and chunks of granite as thick as a man's body fell into the street.

Ted watched Shep monotonously checking the machine-gun fire.

"They're after us," he said.





*"Amigos! What a glorious day!" the Colonel exclaimed. "Parador congratulates you. What a slaughter!"*

"Damn' right," grumbled Shep. "These explosions throw my aim out."

From somewhere, in the hell of noise and confusion, a runner appeared in the long corridor. The Colonel requested that one of the Americans come at once to the barracks—they needed men for the guns there. Shep cursed fluently at the interruption to his work, then told Ted to take a squad and go.

With José and three others, Ted followed the runner at the double down the worn stone steps and out the back of the building. The alleyway was not at that moment a battle-ground, but as they reached it another shell struck the front of the monastery. The explosion was so terrific and so close that it did not seem possible anyone had survived it, and Ted's heart sank, but before he turned the corner he heard the machine-guns again, barely a minute late, and their rattle was sweeter than music.

There was no further sound of heavy shells falling, because none were left to fall. Don Miguel had used his last one. It had not been ineffective, for it had silenced two of Shep's four guns.

Ted and his squad zigzagged through the streets, choosing the back alleys which the messenger seemed to know very well, running close to the faces of the houses, peering around the corners and making a dash for it when they had to cross. Instinctively they tried to draw their necks down into their shoulders like turtles. The side streets were deserted except for an occasional running man who seemed to have no connection with anyone else. The houses had shut their shutters. In front of the barracks, the plaza writhed with a mass of fighting soldiers. Ted made a last dash across a corner and found himself inside. He was conscious of being out of breath and terribly thirsty. He had only two men with him, José and another.

It was easy to find the guns. They were mounted on the sunny balcony where the Colonel had had his breakfasts. The tiles around them were wet and slippery. The men who had manned them lay piled in the corner like dummies thrown out of the way. For a moment Ted could not tell what to do, for the crowd on the parade-ground was so confused that it was impossible to tell which side one was firing on. He rolled

out the ammunition which remained stacked in the inner room, and assigned two men to each gun. On the far edge of the parade-ground an enemy sharpshooter, a little out of the crowd, saw them and deliberately raised his rifle to his shoulder. The bullet cracked between the pillars of the balustrade and buried itself in the wall behind them. Ted caught a flicker of fear in José's eyes, and forced himself to smile debonairly, although it was apparent to him that they were a superb target.

THEN Colonel Corotizo appeared on the balcony and took in the situation at one glance. His blue tunic was half open, the gold epaulette torn off one shoulder, black half moons of sweat almost to the belt under each arm, splashes of blood down one side, but his visored cap was still cocked at a jaunty angle. He climbed on the balustrade and shouted in a tremendous voice which carried above the bedlam:

*"Loyalistas! Par aquí!"*

The stinging bees sang around him, and he sheltered himself behind a pillar. Now there was a movement in the confusion below, a surging toward the barracks, and one side began to detach itself from the other. Ted directed his first fire at a knot where the olive-green uniforms of Don Miguel's men looked the thickest. The knot went down into a heap. He bracketed the two sides of the ground and swung slowly toward the middle. The sharpshooter in the shade of the building opposite crumpled up. Ted knew that he was firing too high in the main, but he did not dare aim more directly into the crowd.

The effect of renewed fire coming from machine-guns which they had thought silenced, broke the morale of Don Miguel's fighters who had already lost the best of their officers. They wavered a little, and the government troops pressed the advantage. In a moment panic struck as a wind waves across a field of wheat. The parade-ground was full of running figures, hunters and hunted. All were running, shouting. A moment more, and the parade-ground was empty, except for the men on the ground who did not get up.

Ted ceased firing and wiped the sweat out of his eyes. The other gun was silent too, and both the men who had been working it lay loosely across it. José, his face the color of cheese, sat on the floor looking rather foolish, pressing his

hand to a shoulder which rapidly turned red. The Colonel had disappeared.

Ted opened José's tunic and felt immensely relieved. There was a flesh wound through the upper part of the arm, bleeding profusely but plainly not serious. He had a handkerchief left in his pocket which he tied around it, then, putting the good arm over his own shoulders, half carried the boy inside, laid him on the first bed he found, came out again, and ran through the corridors with a dim idea of finding help.

A series of screams led him to the doctors. There were four of them, operating in a hastily contrived ward which had been the main dining-room. The screams died into a gurgle as the ether took effect. An unwounded soldier acting as orderly pushed past Ted as he went in, carrying in his hand a severed leg. It was useless to hope that these men would come upstairs to look after a single case.

Ted ran back. José opened enormous black eyes as he came in and tried to smile. Ted picked him up again, and supporting almost his entire weight dragged him downstairs. The doctors had worked their way down the line of wounded. José lay on the floor to wait his turn, and Ted lit a cigarette for him. It was a mistake, for then he had to light one for each of the wounded, and there were not enough in his pocket to go around. A doctor came to José and started to probe.

"It is nothing much," he said. He washed away the blood, and poured from a bottle of iodine into the wound. José fainted.

At a touch, Ted looked up and saw another runner, bending over him.

"Colonel Corotizo's orders, sir. Will you come with me at once to the monastery?"

Ted was conscious of an enormous feeling of resentment. What kind of a war was this, in which a man did not get a chance to rest when he had finished a job?

But he got up and followed the runner out of the room.

They did not need to shelter themselves behind the buildings now. The main body of the fighting had surged back to the other side of town. They walked quickly across the parade-ground, picking their way between the men who did not move and those who stirred feebly and moaned as they passed. Ted felt his stomach heave; he vomited against the corner of a building. One idea crystal-



ized itself in his mind and became so clear that he could not think of anything else. He did not like being a soldier. If he had the good luck to live through it he would never be a soldier again. He did not like any part of it.

"We can't use the streets here," said the runner, "but I think we can make it across the roofs."

Ted followed him into a strange house and up to the top of it. Two frightened women gabbled at them on a stairway. In some closed room a child was crying. They ran across the roofs, bending low so as not to be seen from the street. They could hear firing below, and above them the sky was full of sailing black specks, almost stationary. The buzzards had made ready. At the end of the block they dropped on a shed, then to the ground, and found themselves in the alley behind the monastery.

**W**OUNDED men, both rebels and loyalists, lay in the alley. One raised himself on his elbow and fired at them. Ted felt the wind of the bullet past his ear. The runner let the man have it right above the bridge of the nose, and no one else shot at them.

They went into the monastery and again up the worn gray stairs, and out into the corridor. It was like reliving a nightmare, moving in a fantastic repetitious dream. Shep was still there, exactly as he had been, checking his fire in a voice which had become slightly cracked, moving from gun to gun. At one end of the corridor there was a break in the wall through which the daylight fell on a heap of masonry with a red stain running out from under it.

"Good you're back," said Shep. "See what you can do about clearing up that junk. I think some ammunition's buried under it, and we're running mighty short."

Ted and the messenger began obediently moving blocks of stone. The plaster wall behind them was peppered with bullet-holes. Two men past help lay under the debris. There were also two boxes of cartridges. Ted looked through the hole in the wall and the pile of dead below sickened him. The arroyo and the bridge had disappeared under a carpet of bodies.

"This is the last box," Shep said grimly. "You've got to make every shot count. Hold it! Hold it! These are our own men coming through. Do you see that? We've got them! *Yee-ow!*"

A long time after Ted asked Shep what the extraordinary screeches were which he emitted as they stuck their grimed faces out of the gap, and was told that they were the rebel yell. At the moment they seemed the very voice of the conflict itself. Don Miguel's men were not fighting any more. They were running, slipping on the fallen bodies of their comrades, leaping over the sides of the bridge in their haste, all but climbing on each others' shoulders in their eagerness to get away.

"Look at that!" yelled Shep. "Look at it! They won't be back here in a hurry!"

A small blue-and-gold figure ran past, sword in hand. Shep let out one of his screeches. The Colonel looked up, and they saw his teeth flash in his brown face. In a few minutes the tide of battle had swept across the bridge. There was no noise in the street now except groaning, no men who could move more than an inch at a time.

Shep and Ted let themselves sit down on the floor of the corridor with their backs to the wall and their legs stretched out in front of them, and looked around. There were two men dead under the masonry, and two more by the broken guns. Five men were wounded more or less severely, and their comrades were tying them up and getting ready to help them downstairs.

Shep went over to look at the wounded. Ted felt as though he would never be able to move again. Weariness like a weight pinned his legs to the stone floor. His tongue felt big and sticky in his mouth. He heard a shout and saw the little Colonel swinging down the corridor, grinning from ear to ear.

"*Amigos!* Comrades! What a day! What a glorious day! Parador congratulates you! I congratulate you! What a slaughter! Tonight the buzzards will eat only Colonels."

## Chapter Nineteen

**A**S the first of the hot panic-stricken men pounded down the road to the farmhouse, they found Don Miguel's car drawn across it, and the Don himself, in his white suit and black cape and hat, mounted on the fine thoroughbred which Pedro usually rode. He had a pistol in his hand; and when he told them in his soft voice to halt, they halted. Pedro rode beside him; and three or four of the



Illustrated by  
Raymond Sisley

officers, trying to bring order out of the rout. With blows and curses, fatherly encouragement, kicks, and a pistol-butt to the head, these sons of conquistadors drove their frightened soldiers into line.

"The army will march to Hacienda Tranquilla," ordered Don Miguel. "I will follow."

The ranking officer surviving, a Captain Lopez, son of a neighboring landowner, was ordered to lead the retreat, and placed himself at the head of the column with some show of spirit and style. The revolutionists shambled after him, utterly weary and discouraged, their wounds showing through the rents in their clothing. Many were still bleeding, and a trail of red drops marked their progress on the dusty road. Occasionally a man fell down, and lay weakly by the roadside. If he could not be kicked back on his feet, they left him there; and before long the buzzards would be sailing down from the sky above him.

Don Miguel sat on his horse and watched the battered remnants of his troops go by. Last of all came an old fellow, barefooted, alone, streaming blood where a ball had creased his neck. Don Miguel knew him well. He was head *capitaz* on one of the farms.

"Ole, Vincente! I can see you have made a good fight. If I had had twenty men like you, I would have taken that city."

"That's as God wills, *patroncito*," answered Vincente; but there were tears of rage in his eyes.

"Climb up here behind me, old man."

The wizened old monkey did not hesitate, but put one foot on the silver-mounted stirrup, and climbed up.

"*Patrón*," he grumbled, "we have not more than three hundred effectives."

"In every battle  
someone loses."



"I had remarked that," answered Don Miguel dryly. "In every battle someone loses." And he spurred his horse. . . .

Ted and Shep walked with the Colonel through the red-stained streets to the barracks. In the Colonel's mind the first exhilaration of success, the pride in a professional piece of work well done, had given way to a burning irritation and anger. It appeared that Colonel Alvarez, that fat pig, the commander of the Second, had been allowed by the General to hold out his regiment until nearly the end of the battle, throw them in as fresh troops, and with them seize the glory of capturing the railroad, and such spoils as were available. Alvarez was a fox, a snake who would bite his mother. He knew very well how to let others bear the brunt of the fighting, and then claim more than his share of the rewards.

Ted plodded along numbly, hardly hearing the conversation. As he passed the mangled bodies which were so newly dead, each step seemed to his fevered imagination to beat out the monotonous question, "What for—what for?" At the barracks he checked on José's condition, which was good, went to his room, flung himself on his bed without even removing his boots, and fell into black sleep.

WHEN he woke, the low stars hung like lamps in the black squares of the window, and Shep was shaking him. "Get up, you! There's no rest in this man's army."

"What for?" asked Ted.

"For because the Colonel has had a bright idea. For because he's pulling a fast one on his friend Alvarez, and he wants to get going by dawn."

"I still don't get it."

"Listen, dope! You're in the army. In the army you don't have to get anything, except get up. They shoot you if you don't."

"I'm sleepy."

"You've had fourteen hours. What do you think this is, a nursery? We're going to Hacienda Tranquilla to capture His Nibs."

Ted sprang out of bed as if he had been bitten.

"Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

Shep chuckled. Tomas had brought them hot water, peeled oranges on sticks, and *café con leche*; and before they left, José appeared with his arm in a sling, palely insisting that he was well enough to go along. Ted started to protest.

"Let him," said Shep. "We may need even one-armed soldiers before we get through with this party."

They left the barracks quietly, as Colonel Corotizo did not wish to advertise his intention, and proceeded to the bridge by the monastery. The swift dawn-lit streets had by now been cleared of corpses but were still stained with brown dried puddles, and the bright rim of the sun flamed like a brass gong over the mountains as they arrived there.

COLONEL COROTIZO had done the impossible. He had motorized his unit. Every car that he could commandeer or borrow, regardless of age or condition, was crammed full of soldiers, grinning as if they were on a picnic. Limousines or bright red roadsters, old cars of unidentifiable chassis—they all had four wheels and a motor, and no other points of similarity. More remarkable still in a city where commercial transportation was provided by oxcart or burro, he had acquired a delivery-truck for his precious machine-guns. Shep was to drive it, with Ted beside him, and Tomas and José inside, to see that the cargo did not shift too much.

They started as quietly as the protesting motors allowed, and covered the first five miles very quickly. Then the road became what Shep called "more interesting." The soldiers shouted and sang, lifted the cars out of ruts with the utmost good humor, and dug away two slides of volcanic debris which they encountered. They soon passed the mule-drawn wagons which had been sent ahead, and with only two breakdowns, covered the forty miles to Hacienda Tranquilla in the record time of four hours and a half. They saw many evidences that Don Miguel's army had passed this way, evidences which lay quiet and were covered with obscene black birds. If there were any faint cries, the noise of the motors drowned them. The regiment came to the last rise, and looked down at the ranch-house in the green valley.

On the far side of the rise they halted, so that they could not be seen, while the Colonel planned his attack. As they spied out the land, they were surprised to notice that no sentries had been placed, and that no one stirred around the ranch. The valley lay below them, green and ominously quiet. There were no horses in the corral, no peons in the fields; no one moved around the hacienda and its outbuildings.

"I do not like it," said Colonel Corotizo. "I do not like it at all."

"There can't be any ambush between here and the house, for there is nowhere to hide," said Shep. "Why don't I take a few men and have a look?"

"No, my Captain, I cannot spare you. You are too valuable. You must command the guns. I will have them taken out of the truck at once." He continued in a confidential tone of voice: "I am damnably short of officers this morning. I cannot spare Valdez—he is too good with the men; and between you and me, Cortez would run at his shadow. Teniente Phillips, will you take the scouting party?"

It was not too flattering to be selected on a basis of being the most easily spared, but Ted was in a fever to reach the house and see if he could find out anything about Martha, and so he saluted with alacrity and went off to collect some men.

THERE was a commotion around the truck which carried the guns. The men had unloaded two, and then, to their surprise, dragged out an old woman's form from behind the coarse blankets of llama wool with which the sides of the van had been lined. She shook them off with dignity, glared at them, and clapped an enormous dirty white felt on her gray hair.

"Shira," said Ted severely, "what are you doing here?"

"I no like Bolto."

"But how did you get in that truck?"

"Is easy," answered Shira, disdaining other explanation.

"You must get away quickly. There may be fighting any minute. I'm about to take a party to the house and see what goes on."

Shira had pulled and twisted her poncho and blouse and her many colored skirts, until they were recomposed to her satisfaction.

"I go first," she said, and started.

"Wait, Shira. You can't do that. It is dangerous."

"Nobody bother me," said Shira.

The Colonel had come up and was listening with suppressed amusement. "She's right," he said; "she will not be thought of as part of an army. Look here, old woman, wave your hat from the main gateway if it is all right for us to come."

He had to shout the last instructions, for Shira was already over the brow of the hill with her rapid shuffling gait.

Ted watched her go, feeling unable to deal with her, wondering if he should have fought the army and restrained her by force. He realized that he had taken on a responsibility which was not easy to handle, but it had become highly important to him to see her through safely. Her bright-colored scuttling figure dwindled to doll size, and finally disappeared behind the walled courtyard of the hacienda.

Nothing happened. Time went on. She did not return.

"I can't stand this," said Ted. "I've got to go down and get her out of there."

"Keep your shirt on," replied the Colonel, in the American slang which he used with great pride.

Shep looked up from putting his guns together.

"A nice guy, but too fond of rescuing women."

"Don't send anyone with me," Ted insisted. "I'll go unarmed, and they will take me for a deserter."

The Colonel thought it over. "You're as safe that way as a small party would be," he said.

"Running after women sure raises hell with a soldier," grumbled Shep.

José watched them, scowling, not following the English conversation, but understanding very well the gestures and the intention.

"Señor Coronel, let me go with him. They can see that I have been wounded. They will never think that I can fight. But if you will give me a pistol, I can shoot well with it."

Without a word, Valdez handed him one, and he ran off. Shep's face lost its easy good humor, and he took up a post behind a rock from which he could see what went on.

JOSE and Ted descended the hill at a normal pace, not slow, and not fast. Occasionally José staggered like a man reeling from weakness, a realistic touch which was not entirely assumed. They did not talk. There was something weird about the silence of the great white hacienda, with its adobe walls, and the huge bronze bell motionless in the tower above the red-tiled roof. A rabbit leaped out of the alfalfa, and Ted started.

"I am nervous too, Teniente," said José, who was too simple to know when he was being tactless.

Ted frowned at him, and he retired into a hurt silence. The steel-studded oak gates of the main courtyard were open,



and not fastened back with their usual hooks. As Ted and José approached, the dry wind moved the gates a little, and they groaned. Ted walked boldly across the yard to the wrought iron doors of marvelous design which led to the more private enclosure before the house itself. They were not locked, and he opened them easily.

"If this is a trap," he muttered to himself, "it's one I'll never get out of."

"Pardon, Teniente?" asked José, and his voice breaking the stillness came as a shock.

At the sound, a little figure popped out of the open door of the kitchen wing. It was Shira, and she was very angry. Furthermore, her mouth was full, and one hand clutched a half-finished tortilla. She beat at Ted with her little claw as if he had been an unruly child, and demanded, as well as she could for chewing: "Why you come before I call you?"

"To find you."

This was flattery indeed, and Shira could not help being pleased. Her face relaxed.

"YOU better wait till I tell you it is safe," she grumbled.

"Is it safe, Shira?" This conversation began to seem too fantastic to Ted. His spine still contracted in anticipation of the shots which he expected from one of the small grilled windows.

"Sure," answered Shira, with her easy acceptance of even the most astonishing facts. "In kitchen is much food. You better eat before the soldiers come."

Ted went past her into the house, and made his way through room after room. All were empty; and most of them bore marks of having been emptied in a hurry. In a bedchamber a candle still burned before a shrine. In the great dining-hall the table was set; and in the kitchen, a huge apartment as big as a church, José was helping Shira eat a half-finished breakfast which had been intended for a great many people.

Ted went on to the outbuildings. Here not only the people were gone, but the animals as well. There were fresh tracks in the mud of the pigsty, and feathers clinging to the fence of the chicken run. In the stable the vanished cows and horses had eaten only half of the fodder. The servants' quarters were even barer than the house. Their belongings had been so pitifully few that they had easily carried everything. Hacienda Tranquilla was deserted.

Ted went back through the house and took an immense red velvet banner from the wall. He carried it to the entrance gate and waved it vigorously. Behind him he heard nothing except the lonely doleful creaking of the untended gates.

## Chapter Twenty

WHEN Ted saw how the crowd of soldiers boiled down the hill and attacked the food in the kitchen, he regretted that he had not taken Shira's advice to eat before they got there. The Colonel did not seem inclined to restrain them, but gave orders that they were to be confined to the kitchen and the court until he had had time to search the house. Ted accompanied him as he went quickly and systematically through the rooms, opening every drawer and armoire and chest.

"The old fox has not forgotten anything of importance," he said at last. "The men may as well come in."

"Do you mean you will allow them to loot the place?" asked Ted.

The Colonel looked at him in blank surprise. "The men will go on better if they get a little something here."

Ted's heart pounded unaccountably. "Then we will go on?"

"But of course. It is plain. We will pick up the trail and follow it."

More like a mob than a disciplined force, the soldiers surged through the rooms. They were as acquisitive and as destructive as monkeys. They carried out everything movable, from a woman's silver thimble to a carved chair which a burly sergeant put over his head like a hat. Objects too heavy to carry, sofas, beds, tables, they smashed with rifle-butts and slashed with machetes for the sheer delight of destruction. They tore the hangings from the walls, the saints from their niches. A soldier with fierce black mustaches slashed a hole in the middle of Don Miguel's gold-crested bed-spread, and stuck his head through it as if it had been an enormous poncho. When they were sated with destruction, they piled the splintered remains in the high vaulted living-room and set fire to them.

Ted could watch it no longer. Feeling faintly sick, he went outside, and found Shep and the Colonel searching the ground for signs to tell them how the Don and his party had left that morning. It was easy enough to pick up the trail.

Down the lane behind the hacienda a great number of feet had recently passed, bare feet and booted ones, round hoofs and cloven, and the wavering ribbons laid by wagon-wheels. The disturbed volcanic dust lay white on the alfalfa for ten feet on either side.

"He has gone to the old ranch," said Shep; and he told the Colonel about the cavalcade which he and Ted had seen passing their cave on the mountains, and what Shira had said. He did not mention Martha.

The Colonel snapped his fingers delightedly.

"But this is perfect! While Alvarez is snoring in the city, we will make the capture. He will never think of going there. Tomorrow or the day after he will arrive here; and when he finds it empty, it will take him two days, the fat pig, to decide what to do; and by that time we will be on the way back. Then the General will see which of his officers has the energy and the initiative. Then he will know on whom he can depend. . . . Tell me, is all the road as bad as this?"

"This is the good part," said Shep. "By the time it passed our cave, it was barely fit for oxcarts; and beyond that, Shira says, it is a trail for only a mountain horse."

"Then we cannot use the cars. And Satan's Excellency has been careful not to leave us a single pack-animal!"

"Shira said the Ferraras used to go up and down by the river."

Colonel Corotizo shook his head. "Too dangerous. With the mountains overhanging the water, we could be picked off like driven pigeons. No, *amigo*. We will walk. Call the men."

TOMAS, who almost alone in the army had taken no part in the looting, but had remained in the courtyard with a serious expression on his grave pale face, carried the message. The little bugler, who was only twelve, and had run away from the military school in Bolto to join the army, was hauled out of a pan of half-cooked *dulces*, and set to blowing, "*Fall in.*"

The men came out of the house, less eagerly than they had gone in, and with their loot still slung around them. They were a ridiculous sight. The burliest corporal had two green velvet cushions strapped to his belt fore and aft, and the billowing ruffles of a woman's petticoat over his shoulder.

Colonel Corotizo climbed on a mounting block which stood by the doorway. His cocky little figure, in a new uniform free from the stains of yesterday, looked as proud as a bluejay. He began by congratulating them on the superhuman courage and indefatigability which had given them success in the glorious battle of yesterday. (*Cheers.*) They had won such a name for themselves that even a dangerous enemy like Don Miguel de Ferrara, of a family which for generations had brought terror to the countryside, vanished like smoke when he heard that they were coming. (*More cheers.*) It was well known that the men of the Third Regiment, and not of the Fifth, had won the battle in Bolto. (*Slightly louder cheers.*) Now, should they return quietly to the city, and leave to others the glory of dragging the dangerous rebel from his hiding-place? (*Rather faint cries of "Que no, que no!"*)

Everyone knew how Don Miguel de Ferrara had oppressed the people, knew that he was an enemy of his country. (*Half-hearted agreement.*) Now their Colonel had made it his business to find out where the old fox had hidden himself, and where he had hidden his treasure. (*Slight brightening of interest.*)

Their Colonel had their interests at heart. He would not see them deprived of glory or of their proper reward. He would not have them shouldered aside by the Fifth Regiment. He himself would lead them to the spot, and more than that, he would see that everything was divided equally between officers and men. They would come back with coins of gold and fabulous jewels, for the family had been rich since the days of the Incas. All the girls in Bolto would crowd out to see them and pelt them with flowers. Songs would be made about them. The handsomest women would throw themselves at their heads. And the men of the Fifth Regiment would be green with anger, for they would be shown up for what they were. (*Loud and prolonged cheers.*)

By now the Colonel evidently felt that the volume of applause was sufficient, for he dropped his oratory and his voice took on a military sharpness. They could not use cars over the road they would travel; neither could they go loaded with loot. Their trophies would be put in the cars and taken back to Bolto for safekeeping, under the command of Captain Cortez. (*Heavy silence.*) Unless of course they preferred leaving it



here for the Fifth Regiment to pick up when it arrived, as it undoubtedly would in the course of a week or two. (*A few smiles.*)

At present—and now there was no mistaking the military tone—*everything* would be piled outside the courtyard gate; the regiment would fall in behind their Colonel, and march on to glory!

The men obeyed with a ludicrous mingling of alacrity and reluctance, and in a few minutes the ground was piled with an assortment of articles which the cars were brought down the hill to receive. The guns and ammunition were loaded on the men themselves, while the Colonel cursed under his breath at an enemy who would go off and leave not so much as a llama behind. He ordered the wagon-train to follow as rapidly as possible. The sun hung squarely at the zenith by the time they were ready to march.

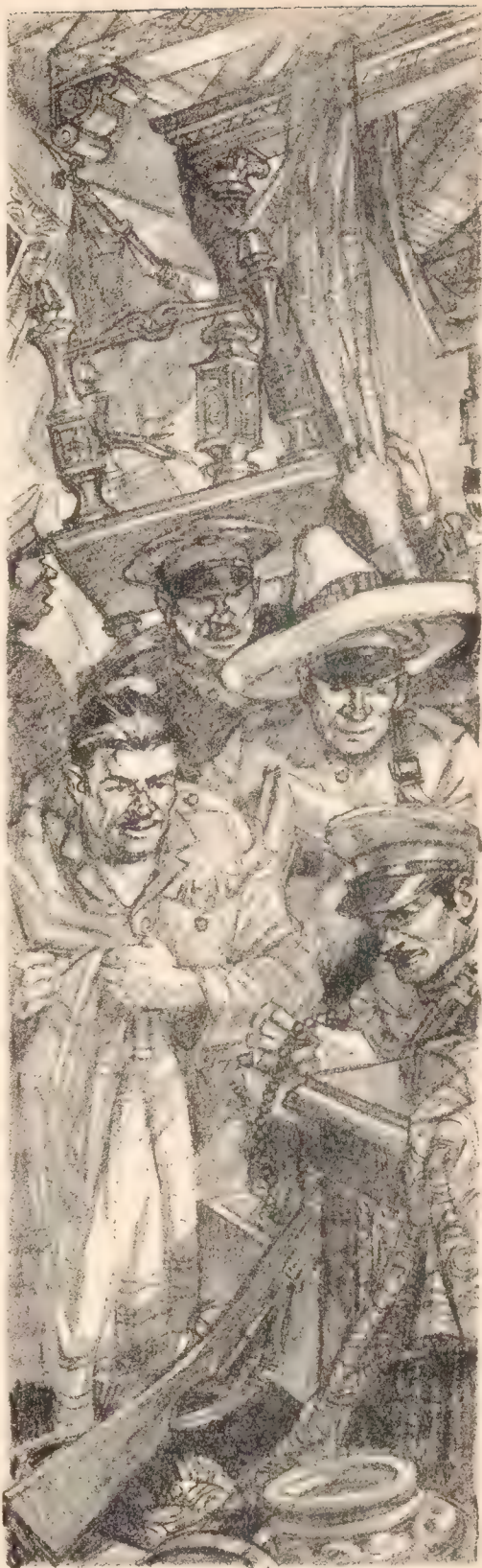
AT the end of the first five miles they came to the village where Shep and Ted had spent the night, and found it as empty as the hacienda, for the men were with their *patrón*, and the women and children had hidden in the mountains. The soldiers broke into the hovels, found them too bare to be worth looting. When one man started to put a match to a thatch, the Colonel struck him a stunning blow on the face with the flat of his sword. Blood poured from a cut cheek, but dumb and frightened eyes showed no resentment.

So far, the expedition was a picnic. They had had breakfast with their sweethearts in Bolto, and another meal at the hacienda. They had memories of interesting acquisitions which they hoped to enjoy later on. The wagon-train caught up with them before the guns and ammunition which they were carrying had time to grow too heavy. Although they stumbled over the ruts and coughed in the thick white dust, they were still grinning. Victory behind them, treasure ahead—life seemed very fine.

Because Shep and Ted told him about the spring, the Colonel ordered a halt on the road below the cave, and sent the men up to fill their canteens, and to bring buckets for the mules. The officers sat down to rest in the shade of a big tree.

"Jumping Jiminy!" said Shep to Ted. "Here comes your shadow."

It was true enough. Far away, a small spot of color bobbed up and down over the irregularities in the road without slackening pace.



They carried out everything movable. Objects too heavy to carry, they smashed with rifle-butts.

"She's just going back to her cave like a sensible old lady," countered Ted, but he knew as he spoke that he lied.

"Back to the cave—with all those fine houses empty in the village?" Shep snorted. "Don't worry, son. You've adopted yourself an Indian."

The Colonel looked grave, because one does not jest about a debt of honor, no matter what payment may involve; but as Ted got up and went to meet her, he followed.

"What are you doing here?" Ted demanded sternly. "Why didn't you stay where you could be comfortable?"

"I come with you," said Shira.

"But you can't come with me. This is an army. We are fighting a war."

"I come," said Shira, sulky but determined. In her mind one salient fact stood out: She had let Pepe get out of her sight, and look what had happened to him. The Holy Virgin and those older gods had sent her another son. She intended to keep her eyes on this one! She glared at Ted, and even at the Colonel, confident of Ted's protection.

"We will take her along," said Corotizo in English. "I think she will be lucky like a rabbit's foot." He turned to her and said in Spanish: "Grandmother, you may come."

SHIRA nodded, not impressed, merely confirming a fact. The Colonel continued to talk to her with easy familiarity, treating her as one of his own. Ted had noticed before the contrast between the kindly paternalism which most Paradorians maintained toward their own Indians, and the brutality with which they behaved toward others, particularly those so unfortunate as to belong to nobody. The fact that this possession was a matter of custom rather than of law, did not seem to make it less binding on both sides.

"We are going to the old ranch, Grandmother. I hear you know the way?"

Shira nodded.

"How far is it?"

Shira pursed up her lips and shrugged.

"On my map it looks like thirty kilos."

"*Quien sabe?*" suggested Shira.

The Colonel tried a new approach. "We will march all night and arrive there tomorrow."

Shira clapped her hand over her mouth and made no sound, but her eyes were laughing.

"Grandmother, thirty kilos is no impossible march to my men. We are

trained and hardened soldiers, not a rabble."

Shira said nothing, but looked more amused than ever.

"Is the road good?"

"Good for condors."

"Are the mountains high?"

"Like the sky."

"Are there rivers to cross?"

"Three."

"With bridges?"

"For spiders."

"Are there villages?"

"Robbers' dens."

"*Muy bien*, Grandmother. How long will it take us?"

"Maybe two sleeps. Maybe three."

THE Colonel turned to Ted and pulled out more of his colloquial English. "In that case, we'll just get a move on."

He snapped the men to attention and started them marching. He told Ted to lift Shira to the back of one of the mules. She perched there, neither frightened nor elated, looking blank and chewing coco.

Corotizo himself was first up the path, preserved by pride, Saint Martin and Saint Christopher, from stumbling over the ruts, and managing even to strut a little. All the time his mind was busy with the problem of how to feed his men, and he found no answer in the hostile barren countryside. Just after sunset he had another proof of Shira's accuracy.

The trail led over a plateau on which stood a curious ruin, the base of an Inca watch-tower. The incredibly huge stones were fitted together so tightly without mortar that the blade of a knife could not be thrust between them. Around the tower stood twenty empty wagons, placed neatly side by side. Evidently Don Miguel had not attempted to take them beyond this point.

Corotizo walked to the edge of the plateau and looked down in silence. A thousand feet below, he could see the thin line of a turbulent little river, roaring and twisting through the gorge. The old Inca trail which they were following wound down to it like a corkscrew, and at each curve the sheer cliff dropped dizzily away. Below one of them lay the half-picked carcass of a mule, not more than a day dead. At the very bottom hung a thread of a bridge, in the fading light only a cobweb stretched across the river.

He turned back hurriedly. He did not care to have the men see that gorge before they were settled for the night.



They were crowding up on the plateau now, starting at the wagons and the Inca tower. He called to them that they should make camp here at once, that they should break up the wagons for firewood. They obeyed with delight.

"Break only a few," he shouted. "We shall need the others to carry back our treasure."

Ted and Shep walked away from the easily diverted men to the edge of the plateau. They looked at the gorge, and looked at each other. Darkness came; the cold wind swept down from the snowfields, and the temperature dropped forty degrees in half an hour. The men shivered in their thin cotton uniforms and the light-weight ponchos which they had brought instead of blankets. They heated their tin canteens at the fire and drank their water hot. There was nothing else to put inside of them.

The leaping flames lit their half Indian faces with a wild light. Few were pure Spanish; most bore in their small dark eyes, wide noses and thick lips the mark of Quechua blood, the early race which had been enslaved by the Incas. Behind them the round tower of their ancient masters stood like a memorial. Corotizo and Valdez, conquerors of their conquerors, sat on a wagon overlooking them, and drank hot water like the rest.

The roaring of the river came up faintly in the stillness from the gorge. The fire burned down. The army tightened their belts, huddled together for warmth, and tried to sleep.

### *Chapter Twenty-one*

COLONEL COROTIZO roused his men at half an hour before dawn. They stamped around on the plateau, blowing on fingers still with cold. Another wagon was broken up to make a fire; and by its light they loaded the extra ammunition on the backs of the mules and the men, and started out. The Colonel himself led the first mule down the trail; the others followed. They had descended a little distance before daylight showed them what they were undertaking.

The trail had been used for caravans, and throughout the centuries each mule or llama had stepped exactly in the footsteps of the animal ahead. As a result it was heavily pitted with transverse ruts, which fitted the quadrupeds well enough, but made walking extremely difficult for the men. The mules let their ears flop in

the disjointed way which meant that they had known all along what it would be like, and were going to put up with it. The men relieved themselves by cursing.

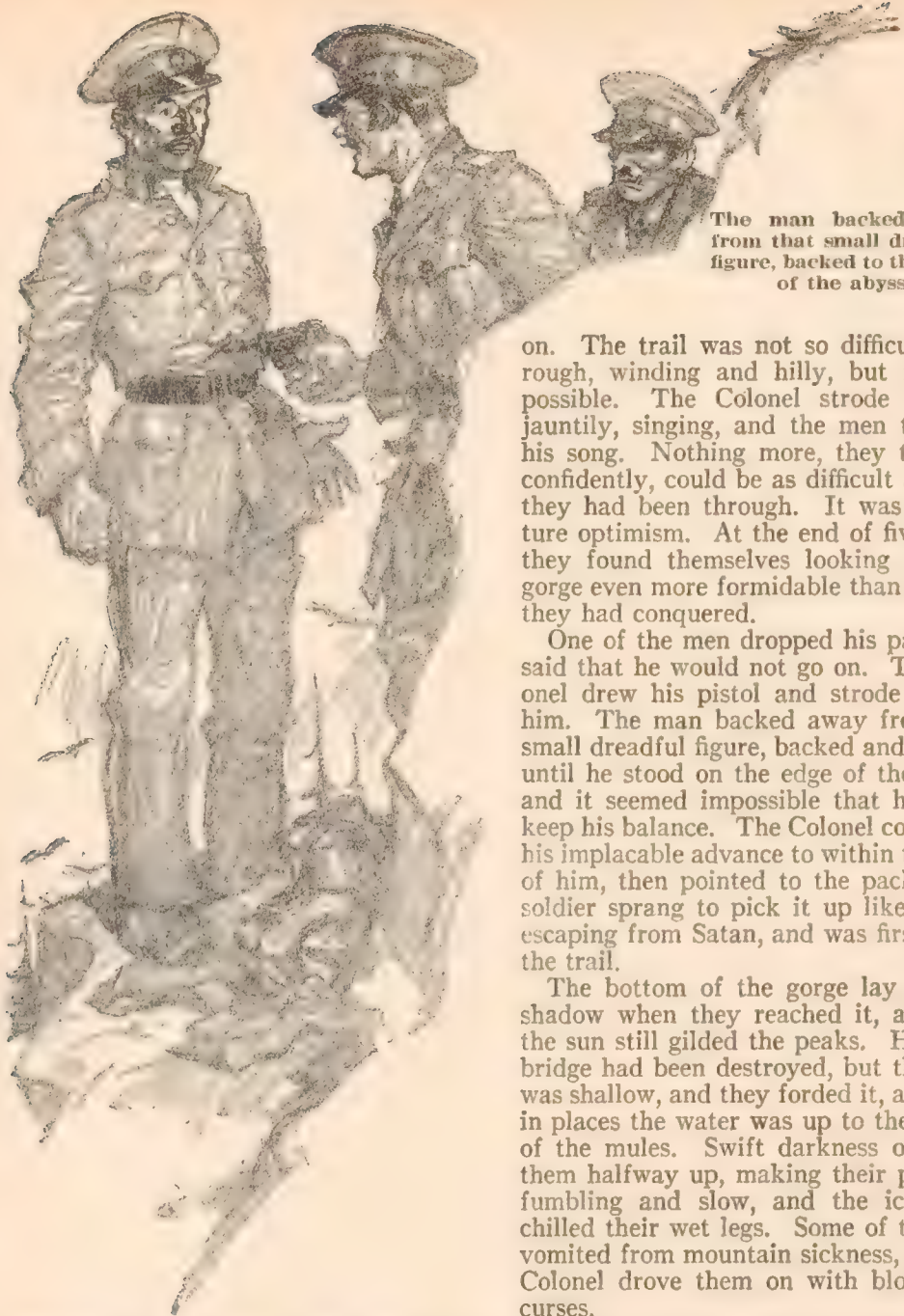
A SOLDIER slipped on a turn and fell ten feet to a ledge which mercifully caught him. He lay helplessly on his back in a paralysis of terror until two others descended, and moving with the delicate precision of dancers, freed him from his pack and helped him back to the trail. The cold sweat was streaming down his face by the time he got there. A little later an overloaded mule fell, rolled over and over, broke the cartridge-boxes on its back to tinder, and lay feebly kicking a hundred feet below. The Colonel himself climbed down and shot it, then ordered the soldiers to pick up the cartridges scattered on the hillside.

Others cut up the carcass, and when at long last the men reached the river, they had a breakfast of mule meat. It was incredibly tough, but cut into thin strips and roasted on sticks over a fire, it at least gave them something to chew on, and the Colonel considered one of his problems temporarily solved. The cataract roared so loudly that they could hardly hear themselves talk; the mountain across the river looked almost perpendicular, and higher than the one they had come down, and the sun bounced over the top of the peaks and poured a fierce heat into the valley. They looked at the suspension bridge ahead with alarm. It swayed and creaked, and appeared altogether too frail to bear the weight of a man, still less of an army.

Tomas, always a thinker, suggested that he should go scouting across it, and brought back the report that there were fresh tracks of horses and cattle on the other side. Corotizo promptly ordered the mules unloaded and started over. The first one had to be blindfolded before it could be brought to trust itself to such an unsubstantial footing, for the bridge, dangling on a cable of twisted telegraph wires, shook alarmingly fifty feet above the jagged rocks of the river.

But at last the crossing was finished. The men made several trips to bring the supplies across, reloaded and started up the mountain.

The Colonel set as fast a pace as the trail would allow. There were places so steep that a man with a pack on his back had to pull himself hand over hand, places so narrow that the loads had to be lessened on one side in order not to scrape



The man backed away from that small dreadful figure, backed to the edge of the abyss.

on. The trail was not so difficult now, rough, winding and hilly, but not impossible. The Colonel strode over it jauntily, singing, and the men took up his song. Nothing more, they thought, confidently, could be as difficult as what they had been through. It was premature optimism. At the end of five miles they found themselves looking down a gorge even more formidable than the one they had conquered.

One of the men dropped his pack and said that he would not go on. The Colonel drew his pistol and strode toward him. The man backed away from that small dreadful figure, backed and backed until he stood on the edge of the abyss, and it seemed impossible that he could keep his balance. The Colonel continued his implacable advance to within two feet of him, then pointed to the pack. The soldier sprang to pick it up like a man escaping from Satan, and was first down the trail.

The bottom of the gorge lay in cold shadow when they reached it, although the sun still gilded the peaks. Here the bridge had been destroyed, but the river was shallow, and they forded it, although in places the water was up to the bellies of the mules. Swift darkness overtook them halfway up, making their progress fumbling and slow, and the icy wind chilled their wet legs. Some of the men vomited from mountain sickness, but the Colonel drove them on with blows and curses.

At the top the wind was terrific. They were obliged to go on for a mile or two until they got in the lee of a hill and found a precarious perch without shelter, where they lit small brush fires, dried themselves, and spent a miserable night.

No one grumbled. The Colonel seemed in hilarious good spirits; the men bore everything with the uncomplaining patience of the mules. Ted and Shep went about among them, ordering cuts washed, trousers dried, wet shoes removed, strains bandaged. They started with their own depleted company, and ended by cover-

against the mountain. Occasionally they had to stop to let the men catch their breath in the high thin air. Always Corotizo climbed twice as far as the soldiers, clambering back and forth, noticing and directing, threatening, advising.

Shep looked at him and at the superbly uncomplaining men with growing admiration.

"I didn't think so at the time," he said, "but I'm beginning to realize that in France we just babied ourselves."

At last they reached the top of the mountain, rested a moment, and pressed



ing the regiment. The Colonel approved of their activity, but took no part in it.

"You've got to hand it to them for guts," said Shep, in tones almost awed. "I never saw the beat of it."

Ted nodded absently. He was thinking of Martha, wondering if she too had suffered in these cold bleak hills, trying to console himself with the idea that at least her party had been prepared for the trip, and must have had blankets and other necessities.

In the next dawn they drank their warmed water and went on. It seemed impossible that the trail should grow worse, but it did. Then after a mile or two the countryside broadened into a little green valley, with a meager Indian village in the middle of it. The men's eyes brightened: where there were houses, there would be food. They hurried down.

The lank mules, relieved of their burdens, fell gratefully to cropping the green grass; but the Indians, lounging apathetically in their doorways, had only one answer to all questions: "*No hay nada.*" Neither persuasions nor threats could change their story. When the Colonel took a mule-whip and laid about him freely, the Indians ran, and left their miserable huts to the mercy of the invaders. After the last thatch and corner had been ransacked, there were gathered only two bushels of dried corn, three scrawny chickens, a lean pig and six dubious eggs. At least, however, there were cooking-utensils, and the means of making fire.

Tomas and two others claimed that they could cook. Everything was stewed together in a great iron kettle, and there were no complaints from hungry men. Corotizo impatiently permitted the delay because he knew it would increase their efficiency.

SOON they realized they were in enemy country: They were filing between two towering rocks when a bullet struck the ground in front of the Colonel. He looked up, and another bullet went through the military cap which neither broiling sun nor cold wind had dislodged from his head. His teeth flashed in a brilliant smile, and he shouted up the mountainside, where there was nothing to be seen but rocks and bushes:

"You louse-covered shots! I am coming to teach you how to aim!"

Without hesitation he scrambled up the hill, and several men followed him.

Shep started, but Valdez laid a quiet hand on his arm.

"Señor Capitan, we are only four officers, and there is work to do."

The column plodded on as though nothing had happened. In a few moments they heard a spattering of shots, then silence. A little later Corotizo came back, slightly out of breath because he had condescended to hurry, and followed by all of his men except one.

"Those villains won't bother us again," he said cheerfully. No mention was made of the man who had disappeared.

IN spite of desperate insistence upon haste, they were forced to make camp again without reaching the ranch-house. Only Shira encouraged them, by insisting that they were not lost, that they were on the right trail. The exhausted men slept again on the bare ground without protest, although their hollow eyes stared out with a hungry brightness above the new beards shadowing their chins. Ted, finding himself unable to sleep for cold, hunger and excitement, got up and wandered off to look at the stars. A shadow joined him; and somewhat to his surprise, he saw that it was Valdez—Valdez of the dreamy eyes and gentle poetical manner, not much more than twenty-two, but already *muy soldado*, already a veteran.

They had hardly exchanged a word beyond the necessary civilities of the journey, but now they were lost together in the vast and windy blackness of the night. The mountains loomed around them as silent as the moon; the great low stars sat shining on the peaks. They felt a need of companionship, of casual talk. They climbed to a point from which their voices would not be disturbing.

Later they walked back together to the camp.

All the following morning they were annoyed by snipers. They had three men killed outright, and one seriously wounded, which was worse, for he could not be cared for properly, but was hoisted onto the back of a mule to hang there dying until weakness brought a merciful unconsciousness. On all these occasions the Colonel went first down the trail and first to search for the enemy, intrepid, incautious, exposing himself with reckless courage. It was not surprising that he commanded the loyalty of his men in spite of his brutal way of enforcing discipline, for he asked no risks which he did not take.

The blazing noonday sun was drenching their tired bodies with sweat when they at last stood on a hilltop and saw the old ranch on the mountain across the river.

The first Ferrara had chosen well when he selected this site for its impregnability. This had once been a rich farming country. The mountainside, like the one on which the troops were standing, had been smoothly terraced by the Incas, and with irrigation must have given good and abundant crops. The terraces had fallen now into disrepair, but their outlines were still distinctly visible.

Ted climbed to an elevation from which he could look down on the old ranch. It stood on a rocky promontory made by a hairpin bend in the river. It could be approached from the south and east only by the terraces, any one of which offered an excellent vantage-point for the defenders; on the west, a sheer cliff dropped eight hundred feet into the river; to the north lay a long ridge of fairly level ground; but to reach it, they would have to cross the river and climb the mountain. The inner and outer wall around the ranch-house had been built for an Inca fortress, and the incredibly huge stones held together by their own weight just as they had done six centuries before. In the inner enclosure lay some outbuildings, and the house itself, low, heavy and almost windowless.

SHEP stood beside Ted, taking this in through narrowed eyes and whistling "Sweet Adeline," a sure sign that he was profoundly disturbed. The Colonel assembled his men and made them a speech.

"Soldiers and heroes! We have arrived. Before us lies our objective, with riches and food in plenty. We have only to take it. First, we will rest here; we will send out scouts, and an envoy to Don Miguel, demanding his surrender. If he does not yield, we will take him by force!"

The men showed all the proper enthusiasm. For the moment they were so delighted to be done with marching that they asked nothing more. Corotizo selected his scouting party, his envoy, ordered another mule killed and the flesh stewed in the pots they had brought from the Indian village. This was the first time in his military experience that he had had an opportunity to conduct a real siege, and he knew it might never come again in the life of a modern soldier. His mind was flooded with memories of

knightly usage; his eyes, red from lack of food and sleep, glowed with excitement. He was determined to do the thing in style.

Shep waited until he was safely out of earshot, and muttered to Ted, half in admiration, half in concern:

"Damn' bantam rooster doesn't know when he's licked!"

## Chapter Twenty-two

AS Ted had imagined, Martha had not suffered on her trip to the old ranch. The party had been well equipped, and the night they slept out had been a pleasant adventure. For the first day of her stay there, she was entranced by the beautiful location, the primitive strength of the place, the sense of being in touch with so much ancient history; but by the end of the second day, she began to be bored.

She found herself really a prisoner now, for the daily rides had been stopped, and she was not allowed to go beyond the outer wall. Pedro had returned to Don Miguel, after seeing them well started on the trip, leaving everything in charge of his assistant, Fernando, a grim halfbreed who talked to no one. Doña Adela had given herself over to saying her prayers, stayed all day in her own room or the chapel, kneeling before the little shrine which she had insisted on bringing with her. In the bare cell-like quarters of the old ranch-house, furnished with only the most meager necessities, she seemed more like a nun than ever. Only occasionally did she appear even for meals, her eyes downcast, her face pale, her black draperies flapping around her, her fingers running over the rosary perpetually at her belt.

As for the twenty men who had come along as guard or garrison, Martha soon realized that she would be better off if she ignored them, and kept out of their sight. They lived in a long stone shed overlooking the cliff, looked after the herds in the daytime, and had nothing to do with the household. Occasionally she heard them singing at night, a weird melancholy native music, with an Indian air grafted on a Spanish rhythm, always minor, always sad, yet with a curious simplicity and strength, like the native character itself.

She was driven back on Pepita for companionship. Lola had been assigned to looking after Doña Adela. Martha found



that when the two girls were not together, Pepita was not so giggly and shy, and it was possible to talk to her as Martha had not been able to do at Hacienda Tranquilla.

The plan of the old ranch-house was simple in the extreme. It had one great room, with a large kitchen at the back of it, and a row of cell-like cubicles which served as bedrooms on either side. The four women were all on one side, and on the other, at present, only Fernando. Besides the house itself, and the barracks where the ranch hands were staying, there were several other buildings in the courtyard, all of the same massive and primitive type. Martha did not know what they were for, and no one explained to her. Lola did the cooking, with Pepita's help, and the men apparently provided for themselves. Doña Adela fasted most of the time, and ate a bare minimum of food, the rest.

One day followed another, and all were just alike, hot and sunny in the day, cold at night. Martha found that the best time to walk out of doors was in the mid-morning, when the ranch hands were busy with the cattle on the far side of the mountain. She got a certain amount of interest out of watching the girls prepare the food in pots which seemed to belong at least to the early iron age. At her request, they let her grind the corn and the coffee in a mill made of a hollow stone with a long stone which fitted into it. The mill had strange conventional figures carved around the rim of it, and Martha suspected that it had been there since Inca days, but she had no one to ask about it.

THE night that Don Miguel came back a week later, they heard him a long way off. They heard the hoof-beats and the jangle of harness, the lowing and grunting of surprised and hurried animals. Martha ran with the others to the outer wall and watched, through the gathering dusk, as the weary procession wound down the mountain opposite, across the frail bridge, and up the terraced slope. Don Miguel rode first, on the cream-colored horse Pedro had used.

Martha hardly recognized the animal, once so spirited; but as it came up to the gate, it threw up its head at the touch of the spur, and galloped lamely up to the ranch-house. There it stood, head down, muzzle almost touching the ground, not even cropping the grass under its nose. Don Miguel sat on it, stiff and

proud, and looked around him at the peons. Someone had brought torches, and the wild smoky light played over the faces looking up at him. Each face had a question in it, but no one dared to speak. Behind him the footsore and disheveled remnants of his army were crowding inside the walls.

Doña Adela came out of the ranch-house and walked over to him. Her step was defiant; her streaming black draperies were like sails to bear her forward.

"You have been defeated? You have run away?"

Don Miguel looked down at her, and his pride matched her insolence. They were like two bars of steel striking together.

"The battle went against me," he said. "I have come home to strengthen myself."

"It is God's curse. Woe be unto them who do not heed His commandments, who do not fall before Him in worship!"

"BE silent!" said Don Miguel in a voice commanding obedience. Doña Adela turned back into the house, reciting her prayers aloud as she went. Don Miguel summoned Pedro, who had ridden beside him, and spoke to him for some time in a low voice.

Martha watched, biting her tongue to keep from saying anything. His appearance shocked her. His face had become a skull, with the yellowed skin drawn tightly over it, and the hand on the bridle was that of a skeleton. All her professional training told her to get him down off that horse and into warm blankets as quickly as possible. When he had finished talking to Pedro, he turned to the peons and began to address them in a clear-low voice, telling them not to be frightened, that all would be well in the end.

Martha could not bear to look any longer. She went to the kitchen, blew up the fire, put on some water for a hot toddy, and set some stones to heat so that they could be used, instead of hot-water bottles, in the bed; she ransacked chests and cupboards without ceremony, found linen and blankets and made up a bed in the best room on the masculine side of the house. The two little Indian maids, crying loudly, were entirely useless, and the droning prayers of Doña Adela came endlessly from the chapel, but Martha found the thought of having a patient again really exhilarating. She refused to allow her mind to go beyond just the practical cares of the moment.

Walking briskly out of the Don's room on an errand, she almost stumbled over him, collapsed on a chest outside the door. Well aware that he would find it unendurable if she called for help and exposed to anyone else the weakness of his condition, she got his arms over her shoulders and carried him into his room on her strong young back. After working over him for a little while, she had the satisfaction of seeing the blue tinge fade out of his lips; but his whole body had a waxy translucency which to her hospital-trained eyes boded no good. He lay without speaking and let her do whatever she pleased for him. Only once he opened his eyes, and looked about as if to make sure that they were alone in the room. When he saw that no one else was there, he seemed satisfied and closed them again. The noise of the army outside contrasted strangely with the silence of the room.

After a little while he appeared to be sleeping, but Martha settled herself to a vigil on the one straight chair in the room, and sat there until Pedro came in silently as a panther, and indicated that he would remain on guard for the rest of the night. Martha could not resist asking one question:

"What will happen now?"

"You will see," said Pedro.

MARTHA forced shut the rock-ribbed gates of her New England mind against disturbing forebodings, and went to bed—at peace with herself, and conscious of having done a good job of work. She even began to be glad that she had not left when she wanted to, for obviously her patient now needed her more than ever. It would take some effort to build him up again, for he would be lucky if he had not undone all the good of his hospitalization by his imprudence; however, with the strength of his constitution, and good mountain air, and the quiet of this remote spot, it should be possible. Martha was beginning to look at him with the pride of a good technician, as if he were something she had created.

It was therefore a severe blow to her, when she went along to his room very early in the morning, to find that he had left it. Angry as a hen whose chicken had taken to water, she went in search of him, and soon discovered him in the outer courtyard, directing the orderly formation of a camp there.

For some time he affected not to see her; and when he did so at last, he

greeted her with a charming courtly bow which forbade her, as distinctly as words could have, to speak to him. His iron will was in operation again; he had surrounded himself with an impenetrable atmosphere, and Martha had to retire defeated.

SHE had to wait until lunch for a chance to speak to him, and meanwhile the situation had changed completely. By eleven o'clock the supplies were neatly disposed in the inner courtyard, a camp with crude brush shelters had been set up in the outer. The gun which they had managed to haul over the mountains had been set in place. All this Martha watched with wondering interest. It seemed to her incredible that there should be anything to fear in a situation as remote as the moon. At twelve o'clock, however, she stood with the other inhabitants of the old ranch, and saw the army of Colonel Corotizo slowly accumulate on the opposite hill-top. For the first time she realized that the revolution was something more than talk.

Since no one else showed any surprise, she suppressed her questions. Having nothing to do, she felt as inconsequential and as helpless as a sparrow in a hurricane—and to Martha, almost anything was more endurable than helplessness.

Don Miguel joined her at lunch, smiling and urbane as usual. Doña Adela continued to pray, and the two little Indian girls stolidly went on cooking. The Don made no reference to the enemy who had suddenly appeared, but thanked Martha in the most graceful phrases for the care she had taken of him the night before, and then launched into the history of the old ranch as though he were trying to entertain a dinner partner.

"The original nature of Rancho Ultimo is in dispute," he said, neatly dissecting a pineapple with his delicate hands; "but the theory which seems most acceptable to me, and the one which is held by the best authorities, considers it to have been a fort on the very outskirts of the Inca empire, a boundary protection. Beyond this point, the wild Indians who were never brought under Inca domination, pressed endlessly against the borders."

Martha found it difficult to listen politely, but her host did not appear to notice her distraction.

"It was a matter of regret to my grandfather and myself that so few relics of the Inca days had been preserved until our



time, and so little study could be made of them. We do know, however, that the chief Inca highway ran through this place to Bolto, which was one of their capitals, and on down into Peru. There is a tradition that the small stone building at the edge of the cliff was intended to house the virgins of the sun, and that at each solstice one was hurled down from it. I cannot vouch for the authenticity of this, but there were such customs in other places."

The Don gave her a smile of peculiar brilliance, and lit one of his especial cigarettes. Martha felt that she could not endure so much tact. All her life she had been trained to brace up to reality with a hard stare, and the technique of combating it by a graceful circling movement was impossible to her. The flood of historical reminiscence continued:

"I AM myself of *sang pur*, without Indian admixture; but I have Indian cousins. In the Sixteenth Century an uncle of mine disappeared in this region, and there is a village near here all of whose inhabitants bear the name of Ferrara. When I was a young man I used to go and live with those Indians for weeks at a time. I think I gained there an especial insight into the Indian character."

"The Sixteenth Century seems pretty remote," said Martha, hoping to get the conversation back to the present.

"Not at all. My ancestors arrived here in 1589. In those days the terraces were cultivated down to the river. The unsettled condition of the country made such practices impossible for a hundred years or so, and by then they had fallen into disrepair, the irrigating system was out of order, and more fertile land was available which made it uneconomic to repair it. It has always been a dream of mine to see it restored. It could not be expected to pay for itself, but it might open a way to further improvement in the condition of the country as a whole. So soon as I am not otherwise engaged, I plan to see what can be done."

Martha looked at him with an astonishment which she could not conceal. He was a defeated man, about to make what she felt would be a last stand. Furthermore, to her professional eyes, he was a man very near to death. Yet he talked about future plans for the betterment of the country as though he still expected

to carry them out. It was impossible, she thought, that his acute intelligence had not grasped the situation. It must be that he had passed beyond reality into a realm where only dreams mattered. She had seen this happen before to people *in extremis*. She must at least try to find out for herself what she was up against.

"*Patrón*," she asked, unconsciously addressing him as his dependents did, "are those people over there intending to attack us?"

Don Miguel looked at her as if she had introduced a topic inadmissible in polite society.

"My dear Miss Evans, they have not come here to look at the view."

Martha felt herself blushing, but stood her ground and went on determinedly. She could face any danger, endure any threat, better than this feeling of helplessness and ignorance. She must at all costs find out what was to be expected, and then she could certainly find a way to make herself useful. Don Miguel would forgive her impertinence when he saw that she could help him.

"There are a great many of them," she said tentatively.

As usual, Don Miguel was more than a match for her. "It will cost them something to get here," he said with finality, excused himself from the table, and went back to his troops.

FOR Martha, action was essential whenever she felt mentally disturbed. She saw that there was going to be a battle. A battle meant wounded men. She went to her room and got out the little bag of medical and surgical supplies which she had brought with her from Panama, knowing that she was going to a remote part of the world where things might be difficult to obtain. She checked them over and made sure that they were in order. There was not enough of anything, she realized with annoyance, but handling the familiar objects reassured her. It was no use to start sterilizing instruments when she did not know how soon they would be needed, but she could at least see that the bedding in the hacienda was clean and in order, and she could have a great kettle of water boiling at the back of the hearth.

The long afternoon dragged on. The hot-red sun dropped behind the mountains; darkness fell. Nothing happened; nothing seemed to be going to happen.

This vivid novel of South America today comes to its climax and conclusion in our forthcoming April issue.



*This eleventh story of "The World Was Their Stage" brings in the famous and lovely Anne Bracegirdle, as well as Congreve and Dryden—and ends in murderous sword-play.*

**W**ILL CONGREVE, he of the bright and saucy eye, stood frowningly in the wings of the Drury Lane Theatre. As a privileged character, he had the run of the house; but something was happening there on the stage which assuredly was not on the books.

Mountford, a veteran actor and a prime favorite with the audiences, had the stage; but Mountford was not himself this night. Although it was only the first act of the play, a spirit of dissension was abroad. A figure standing in one of the stage boxes was making interruption, and the crowd was resenting it.

Congreve, who had failed to find Anne Bracegirdle in the greenroom, came up to the prompter with a low query.

## A Coach

"Where's Bracy?" he asked, employing the name by which Anne was known to all London.

The prompter jerked a thumb toward the opposite wings and droned along mechanically, his gaze on the book.

"What's wrong with Mountford?" demanded Congreve.

The old prompter grunted.

"A trull in an actor's mind leaves no room for lines! Besides, there's interference from the box yonder. . . . Gorum!





# for Dover

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

There he goes again—an exit-cue speech, too!” He shot out the line viciously: *“But mark you this! I can make horns of bones that never grew on stag, nor brushed the leafy bough of oaks!”*

Mountford caught the speech. He ripped it out with furious vehemence, and stamped off-stage toward Congreve. Another catcall and a burst of laughter from the box went up. The audience began to shout its anger at this interruption; the house became a bedlam.

Coming to Congreve and the prompter, Mountford halted in a fuming rage.

“It’s that damned rascal Captain Hill!” he cried. “He’s been trying to break me up all during the scene. . . . Ah, listen to that! They’ll be tearing up the benches next!”

Young Congreve looked out into the house, his air unperturbed, even a trifle bored, though he was inwardly excited, for the audience showed its disapproval of Captain Hill in no uncertain terms.

In the opposite wings, Congreve saw old Papa Rich, the manager, frantically pleading with Anne Bracegirdle. She glanced across, sighted Congreve, and waved her fan at him; she was a picture of youth and loveliness in her costume of plum satin. Suddenly Papa Rich, tired of pleading, pushed her out bodily from the wings. With a laugh, she went tripping across the stage to the smoky footlights.

"Ah!" said the prompter in relief. "She'll handle 'em!"

The din swelled up for an instant; then it hushed. She strode straight toward the box in which Captain Hill was standing, a dark, stocky, arrogant figure of a man. She halted, whipped up her fan in the attitude of fence, and stamped three times in prescribed fashion ere she thrust at him. She lunged and parried, and lunged again. In high disdain, she shook imaginary goutts of blood from the fan and sheathed it, with triumphant flourish.

The pantomime evoked howls of delight. The incipient riot was diverted into wild cheers of applause; animosity toward Hill was swamped in admiration for the actress.

"Bracy! Blush for me, like a good girl!" A young dandy, erect in a box, sent up the cry. The crowd caught and lifted it into a roar. "Blush, Bracy! Blush!"

Will Congreve watched her refuse, heard the crowd rave insistence, saw her at last give assent; but he was not blind to other things.

HE had shot up like a rocket amid the wittiest, raciest and cruelest life in London, that of the stage; but he was very far from the indolent young fop he appeared. He played a part himself, assuming all that he was not. A student lawyer, he believed himself a poet. A green country lad from Ireland, he affected all the hauteur of a great lord—and well enough to get away with it. Poor as a church mouse, he played the rakish profligate, and had not yet been found out.

And now, as he leaned indolently against the edge of a forest set, he was aware of something close at hand—a figure in snowy hat and greatcoat that came sidling up to Mountford. From this figure came a hoarse cockney voice, uplifted above the din from the pit.

"All's done, guv'nor! Coach and four beside Drury 'Ouse at ten o' the clock,

and good hosses too. Five guineas for Dover, and no questions asked."

Mountford hurriedly hushed the man, gave him money, bundled him away, shooting swift cautious glances around. A handsome man, Mountford, a man of thirty-odd and a veteran of the theater, able and darkly passionate.

Congreve whistled softly. What the devil was afoot? Usually possessed of perfect *savoir-faire*, Mountford was tonight awkward and distraught, nervous, excited. Some intrigue? Most unlikely. He was married to one of the most capable and beautiful women in the profession, herself a member of the Theatre Royal company.

THE dead hush pulled Congreve's attention back to the stage. Bracy was blushing!

She dropped her head, and from the corner of her eye shyly regarded the young dandy in the box. Catching her full wide lip with even teeth, she turned slightly. A slow pink flush crept over her face. She reached for her fan, and in the greatest of confusion spread it wide; when she dropped it again, her face was a flaming scarlet, her eyes bright with unshed tears of shame.

In the wild enthusiasm that followed, she started to pirouette, faster and faster, until her billowing skirts lifted to a glimpse of flashing legs that spun and twirled her lithe body like a top. She curtsied low; and amid fresh roars of applause ran off the stage and was gone.

Will Congreve swung around. He met the dark gaze of Mountford, read its savage dislike, and nodded amiably. He did not betray how that gaze startled him, what it told him.

"A lovely girl, a girl to love!" he observed. "You've known her long, eh?"

"Twelve years, and loved her all of it," said Mountford. "She was six when she first played; she was the page in 'The Orphan,' and a darling she was!"

"And is."

"And you love her too. Eh, Will?" The tone was challenging.

"Oh, of course! Who does not? All London loves her," Congreve said lightly, affecting to smooth the lace at his wrists. "By the way, you've heard of today's miracle?"

"Miracle?" The somber gaze of Mountford darkened a little. "I don't know what you mean."

Congreve shrugged, finding falsity in the words. "Our London will be talking



of it by tomorrow," he said, and went his way, pondering what he had overheard.

A coach for Dover! Passing strange, for a poor devil of an actor. And Mountford loved Bracy—aye, and no fatherly love either, if the man's eyes spoke truth! But why the coach? He reflected swiftly, as he sought the dressing-room.

"Mountford, it would seem, dislikes me. And Captain Hill, evidently, detests Mountford; the arrant rogue detests him who would perhaps be rogue himself! And all for love of Bracy! Therefore, Captain Hill, good stupid rogue as he is, no doubt detests me as well. I fear I've uncovered something. And Mountford certainly knows about the eight hundred guineas!"

When he sauntered in, humming a careless tune and pitching his beaver on the table, Anne was in her linen shift, busily plying a needle on a rent in her costume. She surveyed his strapping figure and opened her eyes wide at his new and elegant attire.

"Why, Will! What a rakehellly fop you look! Plum Genoa velvet, egad! And real lace!"

"Ah, but it's for the eye of a lady, my dear," he said, lounging against the wall. "I saw your blush. It was the second miracle of the day: an admirable blush!"

"No fault of yours," she said a bit shortly, but her eyes warmed gloriously upon him. "What are you laughing at?"

"Oh, the first miracle!" he rejoined with a chuckle. "I was there; I saw it happen. Egad, Bracy! You've then no words for me, no tidings of great good fortune?"

"I've had words enough for you, Will, and small good it's done me," she replied with unexpected gravity.

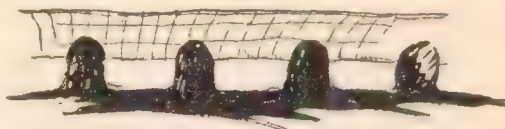
She was very lovely—a delight to the eye and a solace to the heart, and all too well did Will Congreve know it. Too well, indeed! The world was hers; and his love, the love of an unknown scribbler, would be a millstone about her neck.

NOW, master of himself as usual, he refused her challenge to serious talk, and assumed his air of gay banter.

"A guinea for the secret of your blush, Bracy!"

"You haven't a guinea, and you know it," she retorted. "But, for one kiss, I'll tell you the secret."

"Done!" He came to her, put his hands on her shoulders, looked into her eyes. "And how's it done? What's the secret of that marvel?"



Her face scarlet, her eyes bright with unshed tears of shame. . . .

Her eyes twinkled. "Why, I just hold my breath!"

He kissed her suddenly, swiftly, repeatedly. "You blessed, blessed thing!" he exclaimed softly, regarding her again. "You're the most beautiful woman in the world, you minx!" The warm color in her cheeks, the tenderness in her eyes, warned him. He checked himself, and broke into a laugh.

"So I haven't a guinea, eh? Wrong, my dear; I've several! And my play, my first play, is sketched out; it's for you; it shall go to you. 'The Old Bachelor,' by Mr. Congreve. . . . Why, you'll make this unknown Mr. Congreve a famous man! But you've no need of guineas this night, with your eight hundred. A fortune!"

She drew back, shot a glance at the chest in the corner, and looked at him with wide startled eyes.

"Will! How do you know? Who told you?"

"Didn't I tell you I was there when the miracle happened?" He fell again into his smiling, half-sardonic coolness. "It was like a scene in a comedy! They'd



"Villainy indeed! I'm supping with him tonight. I'll do it whenever I please,"

been gaming all night and half the day—Ambington, Dorset and Devonshire. They fell to speaking of you, and naturally I listened for lies, but they spoke truth. 'Hal!' says my Lord Dorset. 'She's a good girl, and damned few like her in London!' He swept the gold-pieces across the table. 'Here's two hundred guineas goes to a good girl. Damme, there's plenty gone to the bad ones!' It struck their humor. They made it up to eight hundred, and off went the guineas to the only good girl in London town. And on the heels of it, egad, I won twenty for myself—hence this elegant raiment that struck your eye."

"Oh!" She picked up the nut-brown boy's tunic she had been mending, inspected it critically, and began to get into it.

"Eight hundred guineas!" said Congreve reflectively. He could not even conceive of so much gold at one time;

though he had seen it often enough on the gaming-tables, it was unreal as stage money. Ireland had given him a cool head and a bragging tongue, however. No one had guessed his slight acquaintance with coined gold, since he had come to London to study law, and gave himself to poetry and gambling instead.

"And what," he went on idly, "shall you do first with your new wealth, Bracy?"

"Buy a mirror like the one they say the Queen has," she responded promptly. "A long one, in which I can see myself from head to foot."

"Practical wench! Don't use too many of those Spanish papers. . . . Less rouge, my dear! You're playing a boy's part this act, remember."

"A red-cheeked boy," she retorted. "I know the part better than you."

"No doubt. A fortune, a real fortune! Now you'll be independent of old Rich's



whining bargaining contracts; laugh at him and go elsewhere, or double your salary! Now you've a prodigious start in the world. I told you London would be at your feet, that you could pick and choose the likeliest ducal coronet to adorn your fair brow!"

"A plague on your coronets! My own hair's enough, and heavy enough too."

"True; and more beautiful than any coronet. By the way, I ran into Mountford. He must be moonstruck! He was telling me how he loved you, and damme if his eyes didn't reveal more than his tongue!"

"That's no news," she said curtly, continuing her dressing. "I've known it for years. But he's thirty-odd, and I'm eighteen, so no one else guesses I'd look at him."

Congreve felt vaguely startled. "But Anne! You wouldn't, of course. The fellow seemed to be in earnest."

"Why not?" she returned coolly.

"Why not? Damme, he must be monstrous owly, with a wife who's good and honest and handsome, and playing in this very company! What more could he want?"

"Change," said she, arranging her hair under a boy's cap. Congreve burst into quick laughter, despite his irritation.

"Egad, what a line! I'll work it into my 'Old Bachelor.' Mr. Dryden is reading the first draft of the play now. And I'll work in you and me, and the guineas, and gouty old Ambington's talk when he sent 'em."

Suddenly she turned a flaming tormented face to him.

"A pox on the filthy money! I won't keep it. Help yourself to it, if ye'll have it. I'll throw it into the Thames. . . . I'll give it away, d'ye hear?"

"Aye, but hearing's not believing, my dear," he rejoined lightly. "You're no such fool. And you're no such fool as to encourage Mountford's villainy."

"Villainy, indeed! He's an old friend of years; so is Mrs. Mountford. What's more, I'm supping with him tonight, after all's done. At Richmond. And I'll do it whenever I please. So what of it?"

"Why, nothing at all," Congreve replied, with a shrug.

Inwardly, he was disconcerted, utterly perturbed. Richmond? Was she lying? No; he knew her too well. She could not conceive a man so black as Mountford really was, a man she had known so long. She thought she was going to Richmond, indeed. But Mountford knew better.

Mountford was for Dover and beyond, with the guineas and the girl, a girl disgraced and robbed and flung into shame for life. For Dover, with a coach and four!

"What's more," she went on heatedly, "Captain Hill hath spoke of marriage, and asked would I leave the stage in such case."

From the corner of her eye, she cast a glance at him. Congreve was aware of it, however, and burst into laughter.

"Captain Hill the bravo, the ruffler, the broken gentleman, the rogue! A fine prospect. Marriage, egad! Well, snap him up on it, Anne!"

She swung full around, furious.

"Will Congreve! When will you give over this eternal mockery and callous jesting? When will you become your old honest self again? You refuse to be serious about anything. You turn whatever I say into a mock. You laugh at me—" Her voice broke a little. "Just now you kissed me; 'twas like your old self, Will! And now you've become all hard and cold once more."

"Why not sup with me tonight, instead of with Mountford?" he broke in.

She started slightly, gave him an eager look; but he had played this chosen rôle so long that the earnest impulse in his words was hidden. She noted only his light smile, his careless lounging mien, his sarcastic eye. She bridled.

"NO! I cannot break with him; it's important. Besides, you mock me still."

"You're a fool, Bracy," he abruptly broke in, and there was no laughter in his face now. "A fool! To waste your time on rascals like Hill and Mountford and me, when half the gallants of London are at your feet, when fame and fortune are yours, when your whole future life can be made or marred in a moment! Pick a man of wealth and title; love him, marry him!"

She stared, wide-eyed. "I do believe you mean it!"

"Of course I mean it!" he said brusquely. "Mountford's an arrogant, desperate ass; wife or not, he's insane about you; he'll stop at nothing to have you and your fortune in the chest yonder as well. Captain Hill's a plain utter scoundrel. Shun 'em both, or you'll be ruined on the verge of your fame and greatness!"

Anger flamed in her face. "And yourself, Will? Once you liked me rarely."

"Oh, I don't count," he said, and shrugged. "A scribbler has nothing to offer in the way of a future. I'll be like old Dryden, sitting about a coffee-house all day and exchanging witty words with dunces. By the way, what of your guineas tonight?"

"Oh, they're safe. The chest is locked. I must take it with me, of course. . . . Will, do you think Rich might plunder me?" Sudden anxiety sprang in her eyes. "He owes me seven pound ten, and rather than pay it, he might rob me or put me out of the way."

Congreve broke into hearty laughter.

"Anne, you'll write my whole play yet if you don't look out! Old Papa Rich plunder you! Why, it's a rare thought. And you fear a fox, when a wolf's waiting to devour you!"

His laughter brought renewed anger into her face—a hurt, bewildered anger. In the silence they could hear the thumping of the *entr'acte* acrobats, the wailing of the hautboy, the pulsing of the drum. Then the shuffle of the call-boy in the corridors.

"Actus Secundus. Five minutes. Mistress Bracegirdle in men's clothes. On stage, Mistress Bracegirdle and Mr. Mountford. Actus Secundus. Five minutes—" his voice trailed away plaintively.

"WILL, you—you unspeakable black-guard!" Anne suddenly erupted in passion. "Well you know I'd do anything for your sake. You win my heart, and then trample it. You make a mock of me. . . . Well, it's ended! Get out of my life; stay out! I've done with you forever; by heavens, I'll prove it to you quick enough, too!" She stamped her foot furiously. "Out, d'ye hear? I'll be played with no more. Ye have no heart, no soul; away with you!"

Behind his mechanical and cynical smile, Congreve felt his heart sink. Alarm pricked at him; she would do something desperate now, and it was his own cursed fault. He was about to speak when he heard a heavy step at the door, a heavy voice, a heavy knock.

"Are you busy, Mistress Bracegirdle? I want a minute with you."

"Captain Hill, egad!" Congreve turned. "Quick, Anne; follow my lead, play up!" He darted to the door, lifting his voice in angry harshness.

"I'll not write another word for you; I'm not writing for my health!" He twisted the knob and let the door swing ajar. "You lazy trollop, you asked for

the play, and here it is nearly finished, and you refuse any advance! I'll have my five pounds, or I'll go to the Lord Chamberlain about it!"

Captain Hill was in the doorway, staring; a burly block of a man dressed in full black, except for narrow white ruffles at throat and wrists. A dark, black-browed man with pale blue eyes devoid of expression, who carried with him an aura of suspicion and danger.

"Five pounds?" screamed Anne. "I wouldn't give you five fish-eyes! I wouldn't give five pounds to Dryden, let alone a milk-nosed maggot like you!" She flew at Congreve suddenly and slapped his face with furious palm. "I wouldn't wrap up old chicken guts in the best play you ever tried to write!"

Hill, in his arrogant way, walked in and motioned Congreve to get out. Instantly, Anne turned upon him.

"How dare you come in here and order anyone out? Don't come cock-a-hoop at me, my fine bully, or I'll scratch your eyes out! Away, the lot of you! I'm going on-stage. And you, Mr. Congreve, you needn't come back. I won't have your play."

She pushed past Hill to the door.

"Oh, there are other theaters, and better actresses than you to boot," said Congreve.

She paused to throw back a furious look at him.

"You sniveling pen-nibbler, the play you're writing about your father will never be staged in this theater!"

"Eh?" Congreve looked bewildered. "Play? About my father?"

"Aye. 'The Old Bachelor!'" she retorted, and her ringing laugh died away as she departed.

CAPTAIN HILL burst into mirth; even Congreve smiled ruefully.

"The hellcat!" he said. "She's proud as a goose in a gale! Well, I'm done with her."

"And she with you, by the looks of it," said Captain Hill.

Congreve swung toward him.

"Don't flatter yourself—and with you as well! Mountford's got us all off the stage. Aye, the rascal! Carrying her off tonight, with her guineas, to Dover and Paris."

"What's that?" Captain Hill lost his imperturbable mien, lost his grin, and took Congreve by the arm. "What's that again? What's this owl-eyed rogue of an actor about?"





"Oh, ye've opened a way! Ye've said things never to be forgotten!"

"You heard me," Congreve said, assuming a sulky air. "A coach waiting behind Drury House at ten o'clock. She goes to sup with him; the blackguard carries her off! I heard the whole thing planned."

A sulphurous oath burst from Captain Hill. Clutching at his sword-hilt, he blasted Mountford in no uncertain terms.

"Amen to that, and more," said Congreve sullenly. "But it'll do no good. He'll stop at nothing; he'll have the life of anyone who interferes. The man's insane."

The soldier was suddenly calm again, but his pale eyes were blazing.

"Insane, is he? Zounds! Steel will slit the throat of a madman as well as any other!" Hill ground out another curse and snarled at Congreve. "And you, you scullery-bard! Be off before I crop your ears and break over your thick head that sword you flaunt!"

He swung around abruptly and went stamping away with a growl of blasphemous profanity.

Congreve whistled softly, closed the door, and swung about. He went to the little brass-bound chest in the corner, that held Anne's personal effects. It was locked fast. With a nod he sank down and sat on it, glumly.

"Not so heavy but two men could easily sling it into a coach," he muttered. "And now, what've I done? Set two rascals one against t'other; not so clever,

perhaps, as it seemed. Poor Anne! She loves me; I cannot break her of it. She tries to rouse my jealousy. Now she's desperate—and only God knows to what lengths a desperate woman will go! Oh, I'm the worst cursed fool in London! When I'd give the whole world to hold her in my arms! Why the devil should I want to build her future on certainty, to see her fame and fortune safely guarded—"

He broke off in gloomy silence. Then he came to his feet.

"Will Congreve, you're a fool, a fool!" he said, with some truth; and leaving the dressing-room went out to the stage door and the cold darkness.

"A fool, and I love her! And for her own sake, must not!" he muttered.

Go to her sensibly, advise her, take her in his arms—why, of course! She would forget all else; by the morrow, they would be married. And the news of it all over London! And her future ruined; an actress married was an actress lost to fame and fortune, in the cynical eye of the period. It was Anne's fresh youth and beauty, her artless ability to cozen all men into loving her, that was winning her already tremendous success. Marriage to a dull dolt of an unfledged lawyer turned poet, would end everything for her.

And now her money: a groan escaped Congreve at thought of the eight hundred guineas. It was actually a fortune, and

blocked him above all else, for he had a fierce youthful pride. It dazzled him into blank despair, and robbed his brain of all sound practical values. A tenth of the sum would have made him, in his own eyes, a rich man.

For he had not a penny, except what he won by gambling. Most of his life spent in Ireland, he had come to London carrying things with a high hand, ruffling it bravely, winning enough at cards to tide him over, risking a debtor's prison daily. On all sides he was thought to be a young man of wealth and family.

He had even deceived shrewd old Dryden, who regarded him as the coming man of letters. Dryden had lost his post as poet laureate when the Stuarts fell; but still, though wearing on toward seventy, was dean of literary England. Dryden, who spent his time sitting in the coffee-house, scribbling and discoursing, predicted that Will Congreve would make the world sit up and take notice. Dryden was reading the rough sketch of his play, even now.

**A**SHIVER took Congreve; the piercing cold was no longer welcome.

He turned back into the theater. Anne had the stage; the pit was roaring with laughter; but he had no heart to watch her. He secured his hat and greatcoat and stalked out, the thought of ten o'clock searing him. It was still two hours away; the best of the evening was ahead; but for him it was ended. He was a fool, and too stubborn to right his folly.

He turned into Russell Street. He wanted to see no one. He turned aside from the parties of gallants or ladies, with link-boys trotting before, their flaring resinous torches blooming like gigantic smoky flowers. He walked on and on in moody gloom.

Without conscious volition, he found himself at the familiar coffee-house, and turned in; a drink, a parry of wit with the gallants, might banish the doldrums. But to his bleak disgust, the place was empty. What with the snow, or perhaps the early hour, no one was here except Dryden, who sat scribbling busily in a corner and cursing his dull quill.

"Will! Will Congreve! To me, stout heart o' gold!"

The lusty call drew him. Old Dryden, pushing back white locks, laid down the quill and leaned back in his chair.

"Why, sir, I'd not disturb you at work," Congreve protested.

"Work be damned! Sit down—have a pipe with me. . . . Server! Two mugs of mulled ale!"

Congreve dropped dismally into a chair. The keen, shrewd old eyes bit into him.

"Lad, I've read your play—that is, the rough draft of it."

"I regret I let you waste your eyes on such rubbish," Congreve rejoined.

"You're a fool to be writing poetry. Forget such things." Dryden chuckled. "Rubbish? By the gods, Will, stick to comedy! Put the play in shape, write it fair, furbish it!"

**D**EVIL take the play! I'm done with the stage and its works." Congreve filled a long pipe from the open tobacco jar, and lit it with a paper twist from the candle.

"Look, lad," said the older man gravely. "I've spent most o' my days with the stage; I know whereof I speak. 'The Old Bachelor' is the finest thing I've read in years; the day after it's produced, you'll be a famous man! Wycherly himself never did a thing half so good."

Despite his gloom, Congreve thrilled to such praise from such a man.

"It's kind of you to say so, Mr. Dryden," he rejoined. He was stripped now of all his gayety, of all his affected worldliness and boredom; he was just himself, lonely and heartsick. "It's kind of you."

"Damme, what's got into you?" exclaimed Dryden, and seized a mug. "Here, drink up! A health to Will Congreve's first play! Give it to Bracegirdle, lad."

Congreve winced and put down his mug. Dryden frowned at him.

"Art ill?"

"Aye. Ill to the soul, of my own folly."

"A healthy sickness! Splendid! Why, you're all tricked out in Genoa velvet and real lace—better and better! Go lose a hundred guineas at the tables and feel better!"

"A hundred guineas!" Congreve broke into bitter, scornful laughter. "Because I've ruffled it like a gallant, because I've pretended to throw money away, you've all thought I had plenty. I have none, d'ye understand? None! Not a farthing, except what's won at the cards. I'm a cheat, a fraud, a failure, a worthless fool who's tricked himself and lost all that's worth while in life."

His outburst ended. Dryden stared in astonishment and delight.

"Sink me if you're not talking like a



real poet, Will! I'll change my advice. Go home this night and write a poem; it should be a brave one."

"This night!" repeated Congreve. "I'm in hell this night."

Dryden's face changed. His eyes warmed; he put out a hand and touched that of Congreve.

"Will, what is it? I love ye, lad, as ye were mine own. I see now it's real trouble; tell it me. Trust me. Empty the sad heart and let a friend give counsel, or whatever else ye may need."

Congreve melted; his proud reserve broke down before this friendliness. All his assumption of rakehell cynicism went to pieces. He blurted out everything; the amazing yet typical story of the eight hundred guineas, his own refusal to spoil Anne's future, the sinister business of Mountford's passion, and what he had done to check this by means of Captain Hill. He laid bare the whole sorry situation, and spared himself nothing in the telling. His touch of Irish speech came back to him in his emotion.

"There y'are; I'm a fool, yet I've done the wise thing," he concluded bitterly. "Or have I? Damme if I know. But Anne's in a mood to do anything, merely to spite me."

"And quite right. You've denied the first principle of love. . . . Tell the lass!" Dryden said, checking a furtive twitch of his thin lips. "Mountford's a foul rogue; Captain Hill is a plain blackguard. And you've left Anne to their clutches and her own desperation."

CONGREGVE gazed at him from haggard eyes.

"Ye know well I cannot think of love, with not a penny!"

Dryden sipped his ale, puffed his pipe alight, and nodded.

"Will ye let me tell ye three things, and not interrupt?"

"Aye."

"From an old man to a young man, then: First! Bracegirdle's an immense success, and will be a greater success—only while she's young and fresh and clever. She's honest and artless, but she has nothing deep. She'll never marry a lord and make a great lady. Let love uphold her, and she'll go far; let her lose love and follow desperation, and she'll turn into a careless, reckless light-o'-love and end in the gutter. Therefore, let your love uphold her."

Congreve said nothing, but the color rose in his cheeks.

"Second!" went on Dryden. "'The Old Bachelor,' for a first play, is a masterpiece. It'll be a hit. Your name will be famous when that of Bracegirdle is forgotten; more likely, your fame will carry hers to the skies, for you've put her in this play. You must do others for her. You have a wit, a precision in words, a talent for scenes, that's positively diabolical! Will, I give you my word that inside six months you'll be England's greatest writer of comedies! And this means fame and future and wealth."

He paused, puffing, and a smile stole into his eyes.

THIRD! I'm no more poet laureate; but the name o' John Dryden carries weight. I have friends and influence. I shall do for you tomorrow what I'd have done long since, had I guessed your financial plight—secure you a State post, which amounts to a pension that'll keep ye from want. And there'll be money provided for all present needs, advanced against the success of 'The Old Bachelor,' which I'll personally guarantee. All this, contingent upon one thing: One simple action on your part, lad."

He paused again. Congreve was alight with a flush of incredulity, of delighted gratitude, of breathless happiness. He gripped Dryden's hand.

"Oh, ye've opened a way! Ye've said things never to be forgotten!" he cried. "I'll do anything you say, anything you ask. . . . What is it, quickly?"

"Look at the clock, then go undo your boyish folly."

Congreve started. He looked at the clock, which said twenty minutes before ten. With one clutch at hat and coat, he was gone. . . .

The snow had long since ceased to fall; the sky was clearing; the riot was over, and the watch had hustled away the last remnants of it. For a riot there had been, and men hurt; soldiers, said some, had started it, and the mob had stoned Captain Hill, not liking soldiers in any case.

"A clear night with little snow," chanted the sergeant of the watch, as his bobbing lanterns swung off into Russell Street. "Ten o'clock, and all's well!"

Drury Lane was empty and deserted, except for the dark mass of a coach standing outside the courtyard of Drury House. The horses steamed; the coachman stamped up and down the icy cobbles, thumping his arms for circulation.

Starlight was peeping over the chimney-pots; a shadowy group drew into sight, coming from the darkened theater. Two men carried a weight between them, followed by the figure of Mountford, a woman on his arm. They stamped up to the coach.

"Shall we strap it on the boot, master?" asked one of the men.

"No, no! Inside!" directed Mountford, his voice hoarse with excitement. "Inside!"

They swung open the door and deposited the little chest inside, and drew back. Mountford handed the woman in after it, with a bundle she carried. He drew back to pay the two men, while the coachman mounted to his box.

"There y'are, lads."

"Wot, guv'nor?" one exclaimed loudly. "And wot abaht the other? Doubles it was, says you, if the sojer cap'n got 'is uppance! And 'e bloody well got it, wot wif a stone bashed on 'is 'ead."

"Oh!" said Mountford. "True, true. Wait—there's money in my purse."

A NEW voice sounded, a laughing, ringing voice.

"Never mind, Mountford, I'll pay 'em! Here's for you, lads—a golden guinea apiece!"

Congreve stepped around from the other side of the coach, whose bulking mass had well concealed him. He tossed money; the gold clinked dully on the cobbles; and the two men, with eager cries, dropped to search the coins.

Mountford whirled about as though stung.

"Why, damme!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "You!"

"Precisely," said Congreve. "I gather that you managed to rid yourself of the worthy Captain Hill after all!"

"So it was you set the rogue on me!" A burst of hearty oaths escaped Mountford. He clutched at his sword, and steel rasped scabbard. "Away, you damned insolent scribbler, or I'll have your life!"

"And no prompter needed now, eh? Well said, well said!" Congreve's mocking tones stung the actor. "But you've forgot something, Mountford."

"Aye? Be off ere I forget myself, you jay!"

"You've done that already, rascal." The mockery gone now, Congreve drove in bitter words. "Forgot yourself, aye; and your wife, the most honest woman in

London! And you'd take the lass to Dover, would you? And then to Paris, safe out of the kingdom. You'd have herself and her guineas."

"You lads!" Mountford motioned the two men with his sword. "At him, lay him out!"

"Not they!" Congreve laughed jeeringly. "Here's gold for you, lads! Let the rogue fight his own quarrel."

Gold clinked again, and the two men dived after it. Mountford, in towering passionate fury, flung himself at Congreve. The latter stepped back, and steel glittered.

"Take it then, you fool!" rasped out Mountford, and let drive.

Steel clashed. A woman's cry echoed from within the coach; the two men found their gold-pieces and stepped away. From one of them broke a sharp cry, as the clashing blades rang loudly.

"The watch be coming back! I see their lights—run for it!" Their heels clattered. . . .

Congreve laughed. "Aye, Mountford, run for it, you rogue! After them, and be safe!"

An oath, a frenzied attack, a flurry of steel. Congreve disengaged suddenly. Swift and high and deadly went his thrust, driven home to its mark. Mountford staggered forward with a mortal cry and a clatter of fallen blade.

CONGREVE swung around, darting to the coach step and the open door. He paused.

"Coach! You shall have your pay, and doubled. Instead of Dover, drive to Richmond—to the Star and Garter. Off, before the watch halts you!"

A joyous eager cry from the coach was cut short by the slam of the door. The long whip lashed and cracked; the horses heaved; their hoofs struck sparks from the stones; the coach rumbled into movement and went clattering away.

Under the cold stars, death in his frozen face, lay the man who had forgotten himself. The actor Mountford, favorite of the Theatre Royal—murdered by some base rival, as was thought by many, or slain in a duel as others believed. . . . His death remained a mystery unsolved, a riddle unanswered for future years to ponder.

But all that Mr. Dryden predicted came true; Will Congreve's boyish folly was made right forever.

The next story in "The World Was Their Stage" takes place in America—and will appear in an early issue.



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A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

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# ACE IN THE HOLE

By JACKSON  
GREGORY

*Who wrote "Gambler's Choice" and "The Splendid Outlaw"*



THE PEOPLE OF THE OLD WEST—  
MORE OFTEN KINDLY, WHIMSICAL  
AND LOVABLE RATHER THAN TOUGH  
AND WARLIKE—LIVE AGAIN IN THIS  
COLORFUL NOVEL BY AN ABLE WRITER.

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COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

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Drawn by Peter Kuhlhoff

"In plain English, my uncle was as crazy as a bedbug when he wrote those wall-eyed wills. He told me fifty times that all he had was going to be mine!"



# ACE IN THE HOLE

By JACKSON GREGORY

*Who wrote "Gambler's Choice" and  
"Mountain Men."*

OLD BILL COLE knew full well that his days—held by some filled with iniquity and general hell-raising—were numbered. He had known for six months, and with a sort of devilish flicker of glee in all that he did, had gone about making the final arrangements. He was a rare old lone eagle; and in him was a stripe of Satan a yard wide, at infrequent times something almost saintlike, and on many a joyous occasion a dash of Santa Claus.

"Even if I got to die like other fool folks," he consoled himself, "I'm going to get me my mite of fun out of it! Hell's bells, yes sir!"

With his preparations pretty well in order, Early Bill Cole, of the King Cole ranch, still estimated that his course had a few weeks to run; but that was before this particular morning had blossomed in shining gold out of the shadowy dawn. It was always his habit to be astir before the new day came in; The things he loved with all that wild old heart of his were the good earth and green things growing, and the earliest hours with the last stars winking out rather like the twinkle in his old hard steely blue eyes. And of late he had been up and out of his enormous old adobe ranch-house each morning earlier than was even his habit. He didn't want folks to see him and realize what he was up to. For each day he was telling some part of his widespread acres, the whole of his world, a last *adios*.

For many years he had inhabited all alone the ancient, picturesque adobe building which long before his days had been the home of the Spanish-California

Estradas. At first, being younger and even wilder than at the end, he had always had the house full, and colorful accounts of proceedings under the red-tiled roof had leaked out. But now—no. A quarter of a mile from the old adobe, beyond a big grove of cottonwoods, were outbuildings, stables and corrals and barns, and quarters for hired hands. His latter years he wanted to be alone, like an old wolf, except when he himself went out in quest of company.

So this morning he could be sure of going about his business, with no fear of spying eyes. He stepped along under the fading stars with his horny thumbs hooked into his cartridge-belt, his battered old black hat pushed far back on his thatch of white hair, his high-heeled boots stepping briskly. He was damned if he'd crawl about like an old man, seen or unseen!

The house was on a gently bosomed site, with big oaks all about it; to the west, miles away, the mountains were growing darkly purple at this hour; between the house and the mountains were little rippling green hills where many a tall pine and many a tight clump of young pines grew. He walked toward the nearest hill with the three nobly tall pines on its crest. Here was a place of vantage well above the slopes where chaparral and manzanita wove themselves into thickets for rabbits to hide in.

IT was still half dark when he came to the one pine which, with no one in the least suspecting it, he had loved with a deep, still, fragrantly romantic love for nearly forty years. There was a reason, locked away in his own heart. In the

half-dark, and with no eyes to see, he pulled off his hat and looked up at the one star, still bright, laughing down at him through the branches. He put his long, thin, sinewy arms as far as he could about the tree. He pressed his grizzled cheek against the bark, so rough, yet to his feeling so tenderly soft. . . .

Then a rifle-shot, clear and vicious, cracked through the still loveliness of the hour, and old Early Bill Cole felt a stab of pain. For a moment he clung to the pine tree, gripping it tight for support. Then, quick and erect, he stepped free of it; and as he did so dragged both of his old guns, almost as old and worn and deadly as himself, up from their loose leathers.

HIS shrewd wintry eyes barely discerned a smoke-puff like a wisp of vanishing mist hanging above the thicket where a fiercer animal than brush rabbits was hiding this morning—and not waiting for any sure target, he started blazing away with both guns. What amazed him, however, was that no second shot winged his way.

So still was the hour that small sounds carried far and distinct; he heard a man crashing his way through the bushes, and prayed through clenched teeth for a fair sight of him. None was afforded, however, until his assailant, having run to a horse tethered under the crown of the slope, mounted to the saddle. The distance was great, the light none too good; Early Bill leaned against his old pine and steadied himself and was very deliberate about his next shot. . . . And then, with a catch in his throat, he laughed; there were times when the old man could laugh like a wolf snarling.

He had come within an inch or two of shooting the other man through the head—he had shot his hat off! That's what made Early Bill, contending with the pain of a bullet in him, laugh. The man threw up his hand, by a lucky chance caught his hat in the air—and spurred away from there as if shot out of a gun.

Early Bill holstered his weapons, set his long, lean back against his tree and cursed; and when old Bill Cole cursed in such rage as now, his words would have drawn rapt attention from a congress of mule-skinners. What made him mad wasn't so much having a man try to dry-gulch him; hell's bells, he had been used for a target more than once in his stretch of years! But that a man should sneak up on him, and hide, and spy on

him when he thought himself alone with memories and an old pine—

It was a wickedly wrathful Early Bill who made his staggering, lurching way back to the house. The return over the brief distance which had taken him some few minutes required a torturous hour. He got his door open, got halfway into his living-room and fainted. . . .

After a time—it must have been upward of an hour, for the sun was glancing in at his windows—he heaved himself up, moved shakily to a big chair, slumped down with a grunt and closed his eyes. Presently he stiffened will and body together and got his shirt open. He had lost a lot of blood that he could not afford to lose. The wound was through his side, down low through the lower ribs. Lucky, he judged, that he hadn't already bled to death.

Without getting up, he ripped off his shirt and with badly shaking hands contrived a bandage. Finally he rose and made his way like a drunken man to the door opening upon the old Spanish patio whence he could look down to the cottonwood grove just beyond which the outbuildings were. He saw a faint smudge of smoke above the tree-tops. He filled his lungs and tried to yell; he snorted, though feebly, in disgust at the result. He dragged out his guns; there was a cartridge left in one, two in the other. He fired all three shots, spacing them, and let the guns slip out of his hands. Then he sat down on the old green bench to wait. Though the earlier shots had evidently gone unheard, the distance now was less and the hour later, and he had hopes.

IT was one of his Mexican hands, young Guacho Ortega, who came slouching up the slope, wondering what was afoot, and found him.

"For the love of God!" cried the boy in his native tongue.

Old Bill licked his lips and beckoned the boy closer.

"Get on a horse, Guacho," he said thickly, "and ride into town. Tell Doc Joe I want him real bad. Now, wait a shake! Damn you, can't you stand still until a man finishes? Then you find the Judge. I want him, too."

"*Si, si, señor!*" cried the excited boy. "I'll ride Slim Jim, and I'll go like the wind! But, señor—the first thing, I must get you to bed!"

"Look you, Guacho," said old Bill, "if I've got to cash in, I can do it stand-



ing up. And if I'm going to live, what the hell would I want a bed for? Now get out of here. I'll be here when you get back."



## CHAPTER TWO

THE little town of Bald Eagle, squatting untidily in its place in the sun, with the cattle country lying to the south and southwest, and the hectic mining country in the broken lands to the north, was as lively as any cricket most nights, but profoundly somnolent before what was conventionally termed "first-drink time." This morning you wouldn't have seen a horse tied to any of the hitching-rails, nor would you have heard anywhere the echoing thump and jingle of spurred boots on the wooden sidewalks. But on the porch of the Bald Eagle Hotel two old men sat in their rocking-chairs and smoked their after-breakfast stogies.

These were the two men for whom Early Bill had sent, two of the most famous porch-sitters in a vast area centered by Bald Eagle. They were alike in many respects, and in some were like old Bill Cole himself, though they never could measure up to his stature. Younger than Bill they were too, by some few years: "Doc Joe," who had been christened Joseph Daniel Dodge; and the "Judge," who was Bald Eagle's one and only lawyer, and banker besides, and christened Arthur Henry Pope. Doc Joe's head bore a scanty gray crop; the Judge's glinting white hair was long like a mane; and both wore fashionable flowing white mustaches. One an old bachelor, the other a widower for many years, they lived at the hotel, had their three meals together, and did their porch-sitting in the two chairs which were their property by right of homesteading.

They were sitting smoking ruminantly when the Mexican boy from the King Cole ranch came racing into town. He saw them as he turned into Main Street, and began yelling at them before they could hear a word that he said.

"Hm!" grunted Doc Joe. "Something must have bit him."

The Judge sat a trifle straighter.

"It's that half-breed from Early Bill Cole's place," he said, his shaggy brows perked up. "And he's riding Bill's favorite saddle-horse. Must be something wrong, Joe."

Guacho slung himself out of the saddle while his horse was sliding to a stop in a great cloud of dust, and poured out his story in a deluge of words. The two old men didn't stir, didn't say a thing until he had finished. Then Doc Joe said quietly: "Take it easy, Guacho. Now, tell me—" And this time he got the essentials. He and the Judge regarded each other with poker faces, and for a time no one spoke. Guacho started to tell the whole thing over, when Doc Joe interrupted him.

"Here's four bits, kid," he said. "You go buy yourself a drink. You'll want to let your horse blow ten minutes. Then you ride back to the ranch and tell your boss that we're coming. Pronto, kid!"

"Si, señor," said Guacho, and touched his hat and moved away.

And still the two old men sat as still as the ancient hills behind Bald Eagle. They didn't look at each other again.

The Judge tossed his cigar away, and gnawed off a hunk of his plug cut.

"Looks like the old buzzard must be in pretty bad shape, and knows it," he offered. "Well, the old fool didn't have much longer to live, anyhow. I always told him I'd outlive him; fact is, we've got a bet on it."

"I know," muttered Doc Joe. He looked his cigar over carefully, but instead of throwing it away, started chewing it. "Same with him and me; we've got a bet. Five hundred, like yours."

Then he did stand up and hurl his cigar clean across the street.

"I'll go get my little old black poison-bag," he said cheerily. "You better fetch pen and ink and papers and any other legal junk a dying man might want." Then he let out a whoop, calling back Guacho Ortega, who had progressed only as far as the saloon door near by. "Get along first to the livery-stable, Guacho. Tell Luke to let me have those two young grays, to a light buckboard."

LUKE'S team of young grays could carry a light buckboard at a run for miles; Doc Joe and the Judge were at the King Cole Ranch almost as soon as the young Mexican. They found four of the ranch hands hanging around the house, scraping dirt with the toes of

their lop-sided boots, looking as though they didn't mean to look worried. At the sound of speeding hoofs and wheels they jerked up their heads, and one man came out of the house, a small, mahogany-brown man who looked as hard as nails and was harder than he looked—Early Bill's foreman, Cal Roundtree.

"Howdy, gents," he said, and sounded surly as though he resented their coming. "Come on in."

"Got the old fool in bed, Cal?" demanded Doc Joe.

Cal started to speak, glared at him and turned on his heel; the only sound from him was the bugle blast when he blew his nose.

They went in and found old Early Bill sitting in his big chair. He looked more dead than alive.

"You damned old fool!" snorted Doc Joe. He put his bag down, took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. "What did you shoot yourself for? Or far as that goes, why the hell didn't you do it long ago? Think I like to go skally-hooting all over the country for the likes of you?"

"Howdy—Judge," said the old man, by way of most beautifully ignoring Doc Joe and all his words.

"I've got to get you onto a bed, Bill," said Doc Joe. "I can't get at you right, this way, sitting on a chair."

"I aint going to bed. Most likely, working me over, you're going to kill me anyhow, and if I've got to get murdered, I'd like it better sitting up."

IN the big low-ceilinged room, there were a few good pieces of furniture; good because they were plain and sturdy and honest: big chairs, benches, a couple of tables. Of the tables one was of massive oak, eight feet long.

"If the old buzzard won't go to bed, Judge, being that superstitious and scared of dying because of the devil waiting to grab him," said Doc Joe, "lend me a hand to heave his old carcass up on this here table. Now, Bill, you come off your high horse and do as I say, or I'll bat your brains out."

"If I had any brains," grumbled Early Bill, "do you think I'd let you put your murdering hands on me?"

The two helped him to stand, and with what small aid he could give them, got him stretched out on the table. Doc Joe's skillful hands, whether murderous or not, swiftly denuded him from neck to bellyband and removed the makeshift

bandage. Then for a time the physician—and there was not one more skilled within riding range of Bald Eagle—kept his tongue in his mouth and gave himself shrewdly to his work.

SOMETIME later Early Bill Cole returned to a misty sort of consciousness; he made out that he was in his bed, undressed, bound about with what he judged a couple of miles of bandage, and stuffed into one of his long-tailed night-shirts. At the moment somehow he didn't care.

He had stirred very slightly, and on the instant his two old cronies popped into his room.

"Well?" he demanded as sharply as he could manage.

"You sure bled like a stuck hawg," Doc Joe told him. "Who shot you, Bill?"

"I wouldn't know, Doc; that's the hell of it. . . . Say! If you boys happen to see a feller wearing a light-colored Stetson with a hole in it—or no hat a-tall—or one brand-new out of the store— But let's take up business before pleasure, as the feller says. . . . Got my come-uppance for certain this trip, huh, Doc?"

With most folks Doc Joe, tough old specimen that he was, would have hesitated or hedged or lied straight out—but with Early Bill it was different. Still, he strove toward modulating his answer, toward making it fittingly euphonious.

"I sort of reckon, Bill," he said, pulling at his lower lip, "that it won't be all-fired long now before this is a better, cleaner world—and me and the Judge will be winning a couple of bets."

"Hmph!" said Early Bill. Then that crooked and somehow endearing old grin of his came back, just a ghost of what it used to be, but still there, like a flicker of winter sunlight. "Might be you lose out yet, you two scums of creation! Might be your horses runs away and breaks your damn' necks before I check out!"

Nobody said anything for a little while. Early Bill was resting. Doc Joe stepped out to bring him something to swallow, mostly hot whisky. They lifted Early Bill and got his drink down him. Then they had one apiece.

The draft brought the sick and wounded man a flush of strength. He spoke more clearly.

"Squat, you boys, and listen. Me, I'll do the talking."

They dragged up chairs, both on the same side of the bed so that he wouldn't have to turn from one to the other.



"First, Doc, let's know where we stand. I need a little time and just a mite of stren'th. I'm not going to pop off in a hurry like a candle blown out, am I? I feel pretty good after that drink."

"You're a tough old devil, Bill," said Doc thoughtfully. "If you hadn't been on the skids anyhow, this thing wouldn't have done you in. It's just hurrying things along some. No, there's no hell-fired rush. Say the word, and I can keep boosting you along— Oh, hell dammit, how do I know? Anyhow, shoot the works and take your time."

"Fair enough and *gracias amigo*," said Early Bill. "Here we go."

It was a fairly long, one-sided talk, with Bill Cole now and then forced to silence and rest; and before the conference was over, each one of them had taken several drinks. And pretty nearly every time that Doc Joe went for the drinks, the Judge got up and went outside; and nearly every time the Judge played Hebe, Doc Joe stepped out into the *patio*.

Fortunately both Doc Joe and the Judge knew pretty well what Early Bill Cole had in mind, and in one way and another had had in mind for months, though the definite thing the old fellow wanted to do had yet to be told. Merely taking into consideration the facts of the case, the whole thing would be simple enough, since it was merely the making of a will. But they saw the old familiar gleam in Early Bill's eyes, and were dead sure that right up to the last he was plotting some sort of devilment. Hadn't he said to them on one occasion, with that famous chuckle of his: "Folks say better have you your fun while you can, seeing when you're dead you can't have any fun. Shucks, they're crazy; me, I'm having me a barrelful of fun when I'm dead." Both his listeners remembered that, and were to recall it more than once in days to come.

THEY figured that they knew Early Bill pretty well, though they had to admit they'd had the pleasure of his friendship for a comparatively short time—something like twenty or twenty-five years only. And that much longer ago than that, he had had two friends who had meant much to him. Forty years before, and more, there had rioted through the mountains a small company known far and wide as Hell's Trio: Early Bill Cole, Busty Lee and Buck Cody. Busty Lee and Buck Cody were dead

these many years, having been swept away together in a night of violence; and about all that they had left behind them was their various offspring. Busty Lee had left a daughter with little dower save her loveliness; and Buck Cody had bequeathed to the world a son, and not much to go along with him. Doc and the Judge knew that Ann Lee was teaching school somewhere, and living with her Aunt Jenifer Edwards; and that young Cody was trying to make a mining engineer out of himself.

ALL this they knew because old Bill had told them—and that, some months ago, with the first creeping of the shadow over him, he had piled into the stage and had been away for a couple of weeks—and had come back with that devil-saint-Santa-Claus gleam in his eye.

"I looked 'em both over," he now announced triumphantly. "I even met up with the two of them, one here and one there. And they didn't know me from Adam's off ox, either, because I didn't happen to speak up. They're aces, Busty's and Buck's pups; and me, I'm going to have me some fun with them!"

"After you're dead!" the two grunted.

"Yep! And now, Judge, you're going to make me a couple of wills—"

"Hold on there, Bill! Just because there are two legatees, you don't need two wills!" He looked at Early Bill narrowly; maybe the old devil was too far gone already to know enough to make any sort of will! Then in that case, everything, lock, stock and barrel, would go to Rance Waldron as nearest of kin—his only kin, so far as Early Bill knew.

"Who's doing this?" Early Bill grunted. "Just keep your *camisa* on, Judge, until I say so. Now, I'm leaving everything I got to young Cody and the Lee girl. He's an upstanding young he-wildcat, and she's the damndest cutest trick, and the nicest and—well, dammit, the sweetest you ever laid eyes on! So they get the works. The whole of the ranch and the whole of the cash. You boys know how I've been gathering in a few dollars here and there, account of my expected one-way trip, and how I've sold off some stock, not figgering these brats, hardly dry behind the ears yet, and one an engineer and the other a pretty young girl, would know how to manage. The money's in your bank, Judge, if you haven't stole' it yet; anyhow a couple of hundred thousand dollars—about two fifty now, I reckon, in case the interest

hasn't et up all the principal, or you haven't been losing heavy at draw!"

The Judge, eying him, thought: "He knows what he's talking about."

"Now," went on Early Bill, "I've got a job for each one of you horn' toads, and I'm paying each one of you a dollar a day and found—high wages for you two. Judge, you go in there and hunker down at the table and write me those two wills. Make 'em just the same, giving, granting and disposing and so forth all I got. In one will, give everything to her. In the other give everything to him. And you date 'em both the same, as of today. You, Doc, you move that old trunk of mine to one side and yank up a couple of loose boards and hand me what you find. Let's go! Wages start when you start getting busy!"

The puzzled Judge did his bit of round swearing, had a copious drink and went off to his will-making: Two wills of like date bequeathing identical property to two different people! Dammit, old Bill must be off his head! Just the same, he did as instructed.

Doc Joe shoved aside a battered old leather trunk, got a couple of loose boards up, and finally came up red-faced with a small iron lock-box in his dusty hands. The box was some eighteen inches long, about six inches in the other dimensions, and was provided with two locks, each set about six inches from the end. Early Bill, seeing it, chuckled and then swore under his breath—chuckling came dearly right now!

"I think it was that damn' box of mine put the whole idea into my head," he said. "Having two locks, like, notice? Look at 'em good, Doc!"

"What about 'em?" demanded Doc Joe. "They're just two locks—"

"Look at 'em good!"

"I am looking. . . . They're different—that what you mean?"

"Takes two different keys to open 'em!" said a triumphant Bill Cole.



TO two old porch-sitters of the Bald Eagle Hotel came early one evening a young man on horseback. He rode straight to the hotel, dismounted and approached. There was ample light to

show what he looked like. He was young and lean and brown and tall; that was one thing. In the saddle he had been loosely graceful; from flashy high-heeled boots to the red silk bandana around his brown throat and on up to his forty-dollar hat, he displayed a touch of elegance. A handsome young dark devil, too, when they saw his face.

"Howdy, gents," he accosted them, and sat on the porch, holding his horse's reins. He removed his hat and ran his fingers through his curly hair.

Civily they returned his greeting. "Howdy," they said.

"I'm a stranger here," he told them. "You look like you belonged here. Maybe you can tell me the way to Bill Cole's ranch?"

They directed him, telling him it was a couple of hours' ride, indicating the shortcuts to take on horseback. He said, "Thanks," rolled a cigarette, smoked half of it, tossed the butt into the dust and stood up.

"Only," said Doc Joe, "I don't know as they're wide open for comp'ny right now. Bill Cole's sick."

"Sick? Say—what's wrong? Nothing bad, is it?"

"He aint feeling any too good," said Doc Joe. "I was out to see him a couple of days ago. I stuck out there until this afternoon. No, Bill aint feelin' real good."

The young man eyed him in a penetrating sort of way.

"You might be the doctor?" he judged. And Doc Joe nodded. "Well, all the more reason I should ride along. You see, I'm his nephew. My name's Rance Waldron."

The Judge, after his greeting, hadn't stirred or spoken. Now he flipped his cigar the way Rance Waldron's cigarette had gone, and reached for his plug cut. Waldron tarried a moment as though thinking some word might be added. When none was forthcoming, he swung up into the saddle again, lifting easily and somehow gracefully, a man full of strength and youth and vitality, and rode away.

They watched him out of sight. "Hmph!" said the Judge then.

"He had a hat," mused Doc Joe.

"Yep. Wasn't any hole in it, though."

"Nope. Wasn't a new hat, either."

"Not light-colored, either. Black."

Doc Joe rolled his stogie and the Judge rolled his cud. They didn't look at each other, but just sat there and drew



their eyelids down like two old roosters. After a while:

"Funny, him showing up right now," remarked the Judge. "Just after that damn' old buzzard gets ready to cash in his chips. If those two damn'-fool wills are any good, if either one of them is any good, then Mr. Rance Waldron is out in the cold. If those two wills cut each other's throats, he comes into the gravy, being next of kin."

"And you haven't made up your mind yet about the validness of those wills?"

"How can I tell? I never heard of such tomfoolery. If when the heirs show up they don't look out, while they're pulling both ways at once, this young feller will slip in between and walk away with the boodle. No, I don't know any more about that part of it than you know how soon old Bill is going to kick off. I warned him; was all I could do. And you warned him to keep in bed. How much good did any warning ever do that old horsethief?"

"Rance Waldron, huh?" brooded Doc Joe. "Do you know, Judge, that old fool Bill Cole has sometimes struck me as a pretty fair judge of folks. This young Waldron, I don't cotton to him much."

"Me neither," agreed the Judge. "I noticed we were both sorry he didn't have a hole in his hat. Let's go get a drink."

**W**ARM as the early-summer evening was, a thundering log fire was making the rocks blazing hot in the living-room fireplace at the King Cole ranch. Drawn up before the hearth in his most commodious big chair sat old Early Bill with his long legs tucked under a heavy red wool blanket, his overcoat on and buttoned to his chin, and his hat on too. His only attendant, the only person he would tolerate in the house, his foreman Cal Roundtree, stood as far as he could from the fire, his face glistening with sweat.

Cal mopped with a blue bandana already sopping, and had his say, not for the first time, either.

"Dammit, Bill," he said explosively, "I tell you you're crazy! You'd ought by rights to have some kind of a nurse here with you; me, I couldn't nurse a sick colt. Ought to have a woman, anyhow! Somebody to—"

"Dry up, Cal," snapped the old man. "Go get me a drink. Get yourself one too. And quit bellering like a bull calf."

"Dammit, Bill, didn't Doc Joe say—"

"He's a murdering old fool. So're you. Better fetch the jug this trip and set it close to me where I can reach it. Then you can get to hell out of here. I don't need you nor anybody else getting in my way."

Cal Roundtree, growling like a bear with a sore paw, started kitchenward, stopping abruptly as he heard the sound of a horse's hoofs coming toward the house. Presently there was a lusty knocking at the door.

"Come in, you fool!" yelled old Bill.

**R**ANCE WALDRON stepped in, across the raised threshold, and stood there looking about him, taking in everything at a sweeping glance. Then his look centered probingly upon the man in the chair.

"This the King Cole ranch?" he said. "You're Mr. William Cole?"

"Shut the door, Rance," said Early Bill, and all of a sudden his voice was quiet and all but toneless. One speaks of a poker face; well, his voice now was a poker voice.

Waldron closed the door, pulled his hat off and came closer; standing at the side of the chair, he put out his hand. Early Bill took it slowly, let it go with a degree of alacrity.

"You never saw me before," said Rance Waldron, puzzled. "How did you know me?"

"Oh, I saw you once, two-three months ago, Waldron. Four months ago, maybe. You mightn't remember. Me, I don't forget. Over at Bantam Springs, it was."

Until he finished speaking, it was hard to make much of his face. Now he lifted his head and shoved his hat back and looked up into his kinsman's eyes.

Even so, for another moment Rance Waldron remained puzzled, for the Bill Cole of tonight wasn't even the Bill Cole of a couple of days ago, what with the unshaven cheeks and the sunken look to them, and the great gauntness about the eyes. But Early Bill could never be anything but Early Bill, when you looked closely; and with a start Rance recognized him.

"But—but—" he stuttered. "At Bantam Springs, that night! Of course I remember. There was a card game—we had a few drinks together. But I didn't know who you were! I didn't know your name—they just called you Bill—"

"Better get a move on and bring that jug, Cal," Early Bill interrupted.

But Cal Roundtree didn't budge; he stood stock still, staring in fascination at the visitor's face; the fire-glow seemed to make his face ruddier. Or was it just the fire-glow? Yes, Rance Waldron was remembering! That poker-game at Bantam Springs! An old man, a stranger, sitting in! What a run of luck the old fool had had! He had been so clumsy; he seemed only halfway to know what he was doing; he fumbled with the cards when he shuffled; he made crazy bets and lost—and yet by some miracle in the end he won everything in sight! And Rance Waldron lost his shirt; lost more than just money, because he had lost his head too, and had flown into a rage and had said things. . . . Just what had he said? And the old fool was Early Bill Cole, keeping his name hidden the way he did an ace in the hole—and all the time Early Bill knew who Rance Waldron was!

But this consternation, holding him tongue-tied and at utter loss, was only momentary. He was a young man of parts, was Rance Waldron, hard to down and harder to keep down. Of a sudden, startling both Early Bill and Cal Roundtree, he began laughing. He slapped his thigh with his hat and put his head back and roared with laughter. And for one second, such gay and infectious mirth it was, that old Early Bill came within a gnat's nose of actually liking him!

"Bill Cole, you old heller!" he shouted when he grew articulate. "I might have known at the time that it was you! I've heard about you all my life, the sorts of things a man might expect from you—only he'd never know *what* to expect!" He sobered. "Me, I didn't show up very well that night, did I? Guess I must have been halfway drunk—and your style of playing drove me crazy—and I lost pretty nearly every damn' cent I had in the world, to top it off. Just you wait until I can get into another game with you!"

"I don't mind waiting, being kind of patient by nature," said the old man mildly. And then, still mild and innocent, he remarked: "Kind of funny, your dropping in on me right now."

"Right now? Why right now?"

"Me being sort of laid up like this. You see, I don't get chair-bound often."

"I had a bit of business over the other side of Bald Eagle. I thought—"

"Sure. —Say, Cal, where's that jug?"

"I'll go put up my horse," Waldron suggested.

Again Early Bill Cole replied, "Sure," and lay back in his chair and pulled his hat-brim down. He sat there very still, looking into the fire. A queer little smile, a happy sort of smile with some strange sort of tenderness in it, and a flick of humor—a flick of devilishness, maybe—touched his lips. . . .

When Cal, first to return, came back into the room, he thought the old man was asleep. So he was. Old Early Bill Cole, full of years of wickedness and of a rare sweetness, was taking his ease—in his last sleep.



#### CHAPTER FOUR

IT was hard to catch a glimpse of the girl's eyes, so wide and drooping was the brim of her pink straw hat. Her cheeks were pink, too, and there was a laughing dimple in one of them. She scarcely lifted her fluffy skirts an inch when she stepped up into the stage; there was just the flash of an out-peeping tiny foot, the merest suspicion of a pink-stockinged ankle.

Little Miss Ann Lee, accompanied by Aunt Jenifer, fragile and tremulously smiling under her poke bonnet, had taken the first stage from Bantam Springs, arriving at the small crossroads settlement of Deep Notch in the early evening. There she and her aunt tarried overnight at the very respectable boarding-house operated by a local celebrity, Big Belle. And there they spent the following day and night waiting for another stage to take them a day's journey through the mountains to the King Cole ranch, some miles on the nearer side of Bald Eagle.

All this, of course, was because of the letter she was carrying with her now—a most mystifying communication from a Mr. William Cole—interesting, even beyond its mere mystification, because of the hundred-dollar yellow-back that had come with it. A huge sum of money—but with certain strings to it.

And upward of a hundred miles from Bantam Springs at the trading-post where he went now and then, a young man



named Cole Cody had received a very similar letter. He considered the thing some sort of hoax; and yet—the hundred-dollar “expense” fund enclosed was real money.

So in the end Cole Cody slid into his newest boots and hat, decorated himself with his most flamboyant bandana, looked to his guns and rode through the foothills, then through Black Rock Pass, and came in due course to the stage stop at Deep Notch. He stabled his horse, had supper and went to bed. In the morning he’d saddle and ride on.

But a man never knows!

He had ridden late last night, and would have slept late this morning had he not been awakened by the commotion out in the yard attendant upon the stage preparing for departure. He hadn’t thought anything about a stage, having a good saddle-horse; and he had ridden through Deep Notch simply because it lay on his line of travel. Now, being awake, he yawned comfortably and stretched, and came close to dozing off again. Then through the sounds of men swearing at horses and of trace-chains jangling, he heard another sound: little Ann Lee, very gay and vivacious this morning, was laughing.

He got up then, dressed and ran his fingers through a wild thatch of dark red hair, cocked his hat on at an angle which bespoke an interest in life and full approval of it, and stepped along outside. And just as he got outside the door, Long Peters, the stage-driver, was calling down from his high seat:

“All aboard, folks! Here we go!”

It was then that Cole Cody saw Ann Lee stepping up into the stage. He did catch the most fleeting of glances of her eyes under the long lashes, and noted how the pink of her cheeks was as soft as the softest of apple-blossom colors tinting the eastern sky. She lifted her foot to the step, and looked back over her shoulder—

What she saw was a young man standing irresolute. She couldn’t help looking at him a moment, and she couldn’t help wondering whether he were coming with them; and she didn’t even suspect that she almost smiled an invitation. She vanished within the coach.

“Hold on there!” shouted Cole Cody, and bore down on the stage at a run. He called back to the hostler who had just lent a hand with hitching up, “Keep my horse until I come back!” and jerked the stage door open.

“If you’re comin’ along, pardner,” said Long Peters, his whip poised ready for the long snaking-out of the lash into the pistol-like crack that would start his team off like a shot, “climb up here. No more room inside.”

Cole Cody didn’t make out clearly who the other inside passengers were; he didn’t even see Aunt Jenny. He saw nothing but the girl with the big pink straw hat. He almost made her a bow; not quite, but he did take off his hat. She almost smiled, but then she looked away very quickly and began talking hurriedly to her companion. The driver called out a second time impatiently; Cole Cody climbed up on the high seat; the whip snapped, and they were off.

The girl was saying softly into her aunt’s ear: “Did you see him, Aunt Jenny? Isn’t he—I mean—”

Aunt Jenifer had a queer little trick of smiling, tucking in the corners of her mouth. She spoke for her thrilled niece’s ears alone: “Yes, I know, pet. Really quite handsome and dashing, and all that. To be sure. And I noticed something else!”

“What?”

“He saw you!”

COLE CODY, rocking along on the high seat beside Long Peters, filling his lungs with the sweet dawn air, hearing music in the creak and rattle of the stage and in the clang of sixteen shod hoofs on the hard, dry roadbed, engaged the stage-driver in conversation. He remarked on the horses first of all, not being in the least interested in them, yet singling out the off leader for remark; and in return got a thumbnail sketch of that animal’s career, character and pedigree. He spoke of Deep Notch; of a high mountain town he knew they would pass through the day, Tap Rock; of Bald Eagle; of what a fine day it was. And finally—of the inside passengers.

“Folks that live around here? Or strangers?”

Long Peters swung his equipage around a bend, down into a shallow, dry creek, cracked his whip again and started them briskly up a sharp slope with the lifting mountains looming steep and black ahead. Having disposed of those of his cargo whom he knew, he got around at last to Ann Lee and Aunt Jenifer.

“We’re carryin’ a couple nice ladies, too,” he said. “Don’t know much about ’em. They come this far with Hank

Roberts day 'fore yestiddy; I only saw the two of 'em, breakfas'-time. They're a Miss Edwards—that's the old lady, and she aint real old at that—and her niece, Miss Ann Lee. They come from somewhere way down yonder; around Bantam Springs some place, Hank says. And they never been up this way before; goin' to see some of their folks. Jus' visitin'."

"Going far?" Cody asked casually.

"All the way through to Bald Eagle. We get there early tonight." He eased his straining horses down to a walk as the slope steepened and the road narrowed and roughened. "How about you, stranger? I aint ever seen you any place."

"Me? I'm headed on to Bald Eagle too. No, I've never been up this way. My stamping-ground's down around Dutch Skill's trading-post."

"Glad to know you. My name's Peters—Tom Peters."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Peters. I'm Cody; Cole Cody."

Long Peters proffered his hand, the taut reins still in its grip, and they shook that way.

ALMOST immediately they entered a silent, glooming wilderness. The rutted roadway snaked its way along the brink of a shadowy ravine, winding among thickening timber; here and there stood a whitening stump where a tree had had to come down; and in three places within the next hour such trees had been used for bridges across the ravine; pines for the most part overshadowed them, though there were long gentle slopes along the mountain bases where pines and oaks made close fraternity. Then they rose to a slow and tortuous climb for more than another hour, where the grade had been gouged out of the rocky mountainside. For a while Long Peters had to stop his horses, slamming on his brakes to hold the stage from rolling backward, while the horses rested. "Got to blow the horses seven times before we come to the Saddle, where we start down again," he explained.

At one of these stops where a grassy strip of mountain meadow lay illogically embraced between iron cliffs, a thin stream of clear cold water flashed across the road, and there was a watering-trough hewn out of a log, overspilling with water so clean and bright it made a man thirsty to look at it. There was a clump of shivering aspens, and in the deep grass by the stream some tall-

stemmed flowers grew: altogether a lovely spot.

Long Peters wrapped his lines about his brake and got down, taking a bucket from the rear end of his stage to water his horses. Cole Cody's boots struck the ground as soon as Long Peters', and his eyes went straightway to the stagecoach door. He was just in time to offer his hand as the door opened and a bright eager face looked out, and Miss Ann Lee's little shoe reached for the step.

"Might I help you down, ma'am?" asked Cole Cody, hat in hand, and very polite and grave-faced and formal.

"Thank you, sir," said Miss Ann, also most polite and formal, but not quite so grave of face, for that quick smile of hers was not to be denied this morning.

So for the briefest of moments her hand rested in his. For the same length of time, no longer, her eyes rested on his eyes. Then she lifted her skirts, lifted them perhaps a whole inch to clear them of the uneven ground, and ran to the trickle of water down through a pipe to fall into the trough.

The other passengers, all but Aunt Jenifer, got down and strolled about, had a drink of water and looked the world over from this high place. Cody paid them scant attention: Ann was hastening back, bringing a full cup of water. What with her running haste, and her skirt in one hand and her eyes on her cup, she tripped over a root and pitched headlong—and Cole Cody saved her from a fall by catching her in his arms.

She turned scarlet—snatched herself out of his arms in a flurry of haste. He smiled down at her—just a friendly smile, he meant it to be. She was just shaping her lips to say something; it is even possible she was again going to say, "Thank you, sir!" Instead some wild impulse seized her, impelled her—she never did know why she did what she did next—maybe Cole Cody's smile provoked it. She still had half a cup of water left, dribbling over the tilted cup; she felt it drip on her dress, looked down, saw it—and flung the half cup of icy water in his face. Then she bolted into the stage's interior like a rabbit down its warren.

A bit of color came up then in his copper-tanned face, his jaw set hard, and a stony hardness came into his eyes. He stood rigid, not turning to look after her, not stirring.

One of the other passengers, a plump and paunchy hulk of a man in store



clothes, snickered. Cole Cody moved then; he turned slowly on this man and asked in a very soft and slow voice:

"Did you say something?"

The grin was gone from the paunchy man's face as though his face had been a slate with something written on it, and a wet rag had been swept across it.

"N-o—no, I didn't say nothin'," he explained hurriedly, and backed off.

"All aboard," called Long Peters.

As Cody went around the stage to climb up on his side again, he heard a sound from within. And he knew the sound for a girl's smothered giggling.

"Damn that girl," he said to himself.



TOWARD midday they stopped in a bit of alpine valley where they ate at a long oilcloth-covered table and changed horses. There was nothing here but a long barracks of a house presided over by a lanky Alabaman and his wife, and an old Mexican who helped about the place—just a station for the use of the stage and its passengers. Cody strolled over to the Mexican and engaged him in conversation: this was sure a great country, and there ought to be gold back in the hills, and there was some first-rate stock land through here—and how was the hunting? Much deer and bear?

Young Cody was never sure that he had heard her soft, hesitant approach, but somehow he knew that she was close behind him. Maybe he read a part of the fact in the old Mexican's eyes, glowing with a sort of startled admiration. Her voice, subdued and with a throaty tremor in it, said ever so softly:

"Mr. Cody! Please!"

He turned slowly and stared down at her. He didn't say anything. She twisted the ribbons hanging from her hat; she lowered her eyes and the ready flush came back, hot in her rounded cheeks.

"Mr. Cody—you are Mr. Cody, aren't you? The stage-driver told me that is your name. Oh, Mr. Cody, please forgive me—if you can! I don't know what made me do it! I was just *wild*! I was

so stupid and so clumsy, and I felt so ashamed of myself—and for a minute I thought you were going to laugh at me, and—"

Almost at her first word all the resentment melted out of him; he shot out his hand to capture hers, which came shyly into it.

"Miss Ann Lee, ma'am! Don't you say another word! Only you weren't clumsy, and you weren't stupid, and it wasn't your fault that that pesky root caught your toe—and any time in the world it'll make you happy to splash water in folks' faces, you just send for me! I'd be proud!"

The old Mexican smiled approvingly, pulled on his mustaches and moved off.

Ann looked up then into Cole Cody's lean, brown face, and smiled too. And in another instant the two of them were laughing together.

"But how did you know my name?"

"It's the prettiest name in the world, and—"

"Mr. Peters told you! Of course."

"He couldn't tell me very much about you. All that I know is that you and your aunt came from somewhere near Bantam Springs, and that you are going on to Bald Eagle."

"And so are you! Mr. Peters told me that, too. Have you ever been there? What is it like? And do you know—"

Her aunt called to her, not loudly but in a limpidly clear voice which carried:

"Ann, dear! If you don't hurry and get a bite to eat, you'll get nothing until we get to Bald Eagle—and that's hours."

"I'm coming, Aunt Jenny," said Ann, and she and Cody walked together to the long shedlike building where the others were already having coffee and biscuits and beans cooked Mexican style, and a rich venison stew with potatoes and onions in it. Mr. Cody was duly presented, and bowed over the slight little body that was Miss Jenifer Edwards, and professed himself pleased and highly honored to make her acquaintance.

WITH a crack of Long Peters' whip, they were again on their way. On the high seat, rolling his cigarette, Cole Cody looked well pleased with the world. He had handed the two ladies up into the coach. Within ten minutes he had twice held Ann's hand in his. And—no unpleasant memory now—already he had held her in his arms!

They swirled away through Fiddler's High Pass, curved hazardously along the

steep sides of Indian Mountain, made a descent with brakes squealing into Long Valley, and then began climbing again, and so the bright afternoon slid away and shadows began lengthening.

They crested another rocky ridge; Long Peters, flinging out his whip and sending his horses along with a rush where there was a stretch of downhill slope, said to Cody:

"Look sharp, way down there and straight ahead, and maybe you'll see the sun flash on windows in Bald Eagle. It's only twenty mile from here. And inside the hour, when we start down the Georgia Road, you'll see it again, only it'll be lamps by then. Hold your hair on, young feller!"

Once Cody thought that he did see a flash of light on twenty-mile-distant windows, but it was merely a wink and a glint, and he might have fancied it. The sun was almost down; it was hidden by a pine-studded shoulder of the mountains as they rocketed down into another steep-sided little valley; it was gone for the day when they swept upward again; yet there was no deep dark, but a thickening dusk, rather, with the stars at their shining best. Cole Cody put back his shoulders and breathed deep, feeling the glory of the oncoming night a lovely thing, the night air strong and clean and heady. Then—without warning, the stage-driver cursed explosively and jammed on his brakes and leaned back against his reins until he pulled his horses back on their haunches, with the front wheels against the wheelers' rumps. Quick cries of alarm burst from the coach's interior.

"Tree across the road," growled Long Peters. And Cody, leaning out and peering closely at last saw it, not ten feet ahead of the leaders.

"Now, that's funny—"

"Sit tight! Not so damn' funny, Cody! It's a hold-up. Some fool must have thought I was carrying a Wells Fargo strong-box. Well, I aint."

A voice, a deep, rumbling, roughly unpleasant voice called:

"Take it easy, driver. It's a hold-up."

IT was hard to make out where the voice came from. On one side of the road was a steep slope pitching brokenly down into the dark depths of a ravine whence rose the rush and swirl of a hidden stream; on the other side the rising flank of the mountain made a secret place with its thickets of manzanita and mountain laurel. So it was clear

enough that the highwayman was somewhere on the upper side, but there were a hundred shadowy spots to harbor him.

ALL the while Peters had been busy with his tugging reins; gradually he quieted his horses. Now his body didn't seem to move, but his hands did, stealthily. He wrapped the reins about his high hand-brake; he groped behind him and pulled a carbine out slowly and got it across his knees.

"If I could get a glimpse of that—" Cody heard him muttering to himself, his voice hushed with yearning.

"You heard me?" the voice called again.

"Yes, I heard you!" Long Peters called back, moving his body a little to one side and the other, craning his neck, praying for that longed-for glimpse. "You must be crazy. This is the Bald Eagle stage, and there's no strong-box on it. You ought to know that much."

"I'm not after any strong-box. Do what I tell you, and nobody won't get hurt. You've got a passenger I want to talk to. Tell him to step along, and I won't even hurt him. But he'd better bring with him what he's carrying, or I'll cut his damn' ears off. It's Andy Jenkins. Get a move on, and you can get goin' again."

"Andy Jenkins?" said Cole Cody under his breath. "Who's Andy Jenkins?"

"That little scraggy buck-toothed feller. I don't know anything about him." Peters turned slightly to call back over his shoulder. "You Jenkins—hear what the road-agent says? What about it?"

From the stage's dark interior answered gravely a cool, quiet voice:

"Tell him, Peters, all I've got on me is about fourteen dollars, silver, and a gold watch and chain and some tobacco. That what he wants? He's sure welcome."

Long Peters relayed the answer. Before he had spoken the last word, there was a red flash from a point high up the slope, and the reverberating crack of a rifle; and a bullet whizzed a yard or so above his head.

"That's just to show I mean business," the voice called sharply. "Get a move on you, Jenkins! I know what you've got, and where you got it and how much. Step lively."

Cole Cody said softly to Long Peters: "There are anyhow two of them. That shot came from higher up, not from the man talking to us."



The driver nodded. "I wish I could get a sight of him—"

"What are you going to do? Take this sitting down?"

"I don't like to. But we got ladies along and—anyhow, it's Andy Jenkins' business." He called over his shoulder, "What's the word, Jenkins?"

Jenkins scrambled out of the coach.

"There's nothing much we can do, is there? If we didn't have these ladies along—"

"Mr. Jenkins!" It was Aunt Jenifer's voice. "Don't you talk like that! If you've got something valuable, you just keep it! And if that man wants it, let him come for it. And you boys shoot him all to pieces. I'm not scared of a ruffian like that, who hides in the woods; I never was, and my niece isn't, either. So don't you go and hide behind our petticoats! Don't you dare!"

Cole Cody heard Long Peters grunt, and despite his present baffled rage, the grunt was almost to a chuckle. Then he heard Andy Jenkins saying quietly:

"Thankee, Miss Edwards. But looks like it's no use." There was the sound of his light tread; then they saw him passing on beyond the horses, climbing over the log, stepping briskly with something in his hand—a carpet-bag, no doubt.

NEITHER Cody nor Peters watched his progress; with straining eyes they were probing the dusk among the pines, trying to locate the man who had issued his orders, the man who had fired the warning shot. The latter, they knew, would be standing well-concealed behind one of the big-boled pines; they could not make out where the other was.

The little man's figure began to blur in the darkness as he kept along in the road; from within the coach came voices again. Aunt Jenifer was getting down; she wanted to see whatever was to be seen. Her niece followed. Cole Cody started to climb down too. Again the bull-throated voice roared out:

"Stay where you are! Up on the seat, there! All of you, or—"

Long Peters' carbine cracked and spat fire and hot lead, and cracked again and the third time: He had spotted the other man, the one who had stood behind the pine, and now moved slightly. Cody, with one foot on the wheel, whirled; for a moment he couldn't see anything, not even the little man with the carpet-bag.

Long Peters' shot drew quick answering fire from two quarters. Cody saw

the spits of flame, but even yet couldn't see a fair target. But he heard the heavy thud of a bullet in flesh. Long Peters gave a sound halfway between a choked squeal and a grunt, dropped his weapon—it clanged against iron, falling—and folded up on the seat. The frightened horses began again to rear and plunge.

Cody leaped down, careened into the paunchy man, said curtly, "Grab the horses' heads!" and broke into a run, following the way Andy Jenkins had gone, leaping the fallen tree, stooping and running on along the road.

He heard Ann screaming after him: "Mr. Cody! Come back! You'll be killed!"

"Get back inside!" he shouted at her. "Dammit, *get inside!*"

The paunchy man—his name was Bert Nevers—had the leaders by the bits and was steadying them; a man to take orders. With Ann it was different.

Then, ten steps ahead of him, Cody saw Andy Jenkins: The little man had dropped his bag and had a gun in each hand and was blazing away with both. Then he dropped too, just as Long Peters had done. And now Cody got a glimpse of the man with the deep voice, and saw the bulk of him, looking like a squat giant with the shadows about him.

The target was none too good; but Cole Cody took his aim with grim joy. The bulky man stood his ground a moment, firing back, and Cody heard the hiss of bullets fanning his ears. Through-out this he was vaguely conscious of other sounds; voices shouting behind him, Ann's among the others; the quick beat of a horse's hoofs, pounding up a small thunder. There in swift flight went the other man, the one who had fired the first shot from behind a pine tree. Cody steadied and fired again, and this time heard a cry stricken out of his man. Then Cody heard running boots crashing through the brush, and an instant later the thud of a second horse's flying hoofs. The wild staccato of running hoofbeats died swiftly away, and for an instant the starry night was filled with the hush of the wilderness silence.

THERE was another sound: light running footsteps coming up behind him; and Ann Lee was clutching his arm.

"You're all right? You're not hurt? Why didn't you stop when I— Oh, you were splendid!"

"Run back to the stage, Ann—there may be more of them—"

Head down, he was busy fingering cartridges up out of his belt, shoving them in hot haste into his gun. He stood a moment, straining his ears against the silence. It would seem that the party was over. He walked to where the little man had fallen.

Jenkins was sitting up, one hand as a prop on the ground, the other pressed against his side. By the time Cole Cody stooped over him, the girl was with him.

"Hurt bad, Jenkins?" asked Cody.

"Hurts like hell, yep. And I'm bleedin' buckets. I'm all right, though; lend me a hand."

Cody stooped, picked him up.

"Get his bag and his gun," he told the girl. "Then run ahead and get a lantern lit."

It was the slight and delicate-looking Miss Jenifer Edwards who was the greatest help from then on. After Cody had lifted the little man into the stage and Ann had brought the lantern, Aunt Jenifer—with her skirts tucked up scandalously high to be quite out of the way, and her poke bonnet tossed aside and her sleeves rolled up on her slim white arms—set to work methodically and skillfully.

"He'll be all right," she said calmly as she cleansed the wound with whisky from a bottle Bert Nevers offered. "Get the driver in here."

Long Peters brought himself in, cursing savagely at every step and sounding hale and hearty in the process. He had been shot through the gun arm; that was what made him mad!

Cody and Bert Nevers, using their hands and the stage ax, cleared away the tree; the wounded men were stowed inside; Cody climbed to the high seat and gathered up the reins—and when he called out, "All aboard?" he saw some one climbing up over the wheel to sit with him. Only it wasn't Bert Nevers or anyone resembling him in any respect!

Cole Cody threw out his whip in a long hissing flourish.

few words referring to what had just happened, then silence. The high seat of a lurching mountain stage is at no time the ideal spot for any steady conversation.

He had buckled the stage-driver's leather belt about him for anchorage; the girl kept a hand locked on the iron guard-rail at the back of the seat. But whereas he had to watch the road, she was free to watch him out of the corners of her eyes. She approved of this young man. . . . Unconsciously she drew a long, quivering sigh—

And it was just at that moment, as the stage was about to plunge into another of the dark, forested cañons, that Cole Cody put on his brakes and pulled his horses down, and said hastily—his voice sounded curt to her:

"Look here! You've got to get down and ride inside!"

"Oh!" she said. She whipped back from him, as far away as the seat allowed. She had been having such a wonderful ride! But he was still slowing his team down, looking straight ahead.

"And tell Bert Nevers I want him up here with me. You can help your aunt with the two wounded men."

What a crude sort of fellow he really was! She no longer felt the cool air against her face; her cheeks were burning hot.

"But I prefer to ride outside. It was stuffy in there, and I like the wind in my face. I—"

He had the horses at a restless standstill now, and turned briefly toward her.

"I've been a fool," he muttered. "I wasn't thinking—"

"I've heard that all men are fools," she said brightly. "Are you going to drive on? I am not getting down!"

"I tell you, I wasn't thinking!" His urgent voice sounded harsh. "Just because those two highwaymen rode off doesn't have to mean they've gone for good. They may waylay us again. You mustn't be up here! Let Bert Nevers come up; if there's any trouble, he can use Long Peters' carbine."

"You know very well, Mr. Cody, that those two cowards are miles from here by this time! Besides, you know that you wounded one of them!" She reached behind the seat and lifted the carbine from its place, cuddling it across her lap. "And I know how to shoot. Drive on, coachman!"

"Damn it, no!" said Cody. He could almost see those two men sitting their horses there, slowly lifting their rifles—



AND so, at least in so far as Mr. William Cole Cody and Miss Ann Lee were concerned, all was well and the night was filled with beauty. There was little talk between them; at first just a



So he said, and was sterner than he realized: "You must do what I tell you. And hurry! We don't know that they are gone—we don't know anything. No use being fools! Hurry! And send Nevers to me."

Her cheeks burned hotter than ever. There was the slightest quiver in her voice as she said crisply:

"I won't do it! I am going to stay here. Whether you like it or don't like it, Mr. Cody, I am staying here!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind. Damn it! Look here, Miss Lee—"

"Don't you swear at me! And I won't get down!"

"I'll make you get down! I'll drag you off the seat and throw you inside!"

She laughed at him. "You just try it!"

He put one hand on her shoulder, the other busied with the reins—and Miss Ann Lee slapped his face, hard. Then his temper blew off the lid. Lordy, but this girl could make a man mad!

He caught her hard and fast in the circle of his free arm and drew her astonished body close to him—and kissed her on the mouth, hard! A kiss every bit as emphatic as a slap.

She gasped and jerked away and scrubbed her mouth with her hand—then with all her might slapped him again! The blow jarred him. For an instant he sat rigid. Then again he dragged her to him and again he kissed her.

"I didn't do that for any fun I get out of it," he told her in a cold fury. "It's just the best way I know to slap you back, you little hellcat!"

And, making sure that she saw, he scrubbed his lips savagely with the back of his hand. . . .

She slapped him again, and as he was reaching out for her, she let the carbine slide off her lap, scrambled out of the seat and over the wheel to the ground.

Aunt Jenifer's voice called up: "What's wrong? Why are we stopping?"

He took a long breath to steady himself, then answered:

"I just saw a wildcat—oh, never mind! We'll be going right on. I want Bert Nevers up here with me. Miss Lee will ride inside after this."

Bert Nevers came as desired, retrieved the fallen gun, climbed up beside the driver. "What's this about wildcats?" he demanded.

Cody threw off the brake and started. A scream stopped him. It was Aunt Jenifer.

"Mr. Cody! Ann isn't even in yet!"

"That's all right, Aunt Jenny," said Ann's voice—if it really was Ann's! "I could walk from here. . . . Thank you for waiting, Mr. Cody. I hesitated because I thought I just saw a skunk!"

"Oh, hell!" said William Cole Cody. And from that spot on into Bald Eagle the stage-horses probably made the best time they had ever made in their lives.



THE two old porch-sitters in front of the Bald Eagle Hotel smoked and sat in a companionably gloomy silence. They didn't once mention Early Bill Cole. They had known for a long while that Early Bill had seen his last round-up; yet now that he was gone, the town into which he had ridden hell-bent so many and many a time, where he had dragged his big Mexican spurs clanking along the wooden sidewalks, where he had stamped and laughed and caroused and sung—ah, a great voice had old Early Bill when the mood was on him!—seemed a pale and insipid place.

It was early dark, a couple of hours after sunset, and everything was quiet yet mildly expectant; it was beginning to be remarked that the stage was later than usual when a voice sang out: "Here she comes!"

The stage came lurching and rocking around the bend, the six horses at the run, and pulled up at its usual place. That was because Bert Nevers had instructed the stranger-driver. Men caught the horses by the bits; Cole Cody tossed his reins far out to right and left, socketed his whip and got down. He ran briskly up the steps and confronted the Judge and Doc Joe.

"There are a couple of men in the stage who've been hurt," he said crisply. "Where'll I find a doctor?"

"Who the hell are you? Where's Long Peters?" demanded the Judge.

"Long Peters is one of the men who got hurt. Both of them want a doctor right away."

Doc Joe stood up. "Get the men inside," he said. "I'll go ahead and have a room ready." He went into the hotel.

The Judge threw away his cigar and reached to his pocket.

"Bad hurt?" he asked, and stood up.

"Not Peters. The other man—Andy Jenkins is the other—I'm afraid he's in bad shape." His eyes had followed the departing Doc Joe. "He the doctor?"

The Judge nodded, and went down the steps to watch proceedings and to direct. Already the stage doors were open, and folks were getting down. He saw a couple of females, but paid them no attention. He watched Long Peters descend under his own power. Men standing close lifted little Andy Jenkins out; at first they, and the Judge too, thought him dead already. He was carried into the hotel, Long Peters following.

MEN were asking questions rapidly: Just what had happened? Where? When? The two women, looking bewildered as so many earnest, eager men milled about them, clung to each other and looked for escape. Upon Bert Nevers, known to many here, fell the duty of giving a running account of the hold-up, and Aunt Jenifer and Ann broke free.

Cole Cody didn't look back to see Aunt Jenifer and Ann Lee make their way into the hotel lobby. Ann, looking with quick interest in all directions, saw his back; in the swing of his stride and in the set of his shoulders, she read something of the man's mood. He was still furious; and she had the swift impression that he was headed straight for the first saloon and meant to wash a lot of things out of his memory with liquor. She was, in this, quite right.

Young Mr. William Cole Cody made something of entering the Last Chance Saloon; he struck the swing door with his shoulder as a man might smite an enemy. The half-door, flung violently back, struck a man about to depart, and all but swept him off his feet.

This man glared and showed his teeth. Those teeth of his were as white as snow, as glistening as a hound's teeth and about as sharp. He was a small, aged Mexican-Indian, Porfirio Lopez by name, a stranger here in Bald Eagle, and tonight in no mood at all to be knocked around. His slim brown hand ran like the flick of a striking snake to his side—just under his ornamental jacket.

And then he saw who it was.

"Don Codito!" he cried. He dropped all thoughts of his knife and caught both Cody's hands. "*Gracias à Dios!* Look, señor! I kees your hands, the twol"

"You are drunk, Porfirio," said Don Codito. "Go to bed."

Porfirio laughed like a coyote. But he said, quite simply: "This is one other time, Señor Don Codito, you save my life. We are going to drink one with the other. You will honor me in this little thing, this thing that is so big, Don Codito?"

*Codito*, according to Porfirio Lopez' manner of thought, meant Little Cody. And Little Cody had known Porfirio since Little Cody was five. He slid his arm through the weazened Mexican-Indian's, and the two went to the bar.

Porfirio, frank in all he did, began to cry. He whipped an enormous red-and-green bandana from his coattails, gave it a flourish which made a sort of rainbow arc of the gesture, and wiped his streaming eyes.

"Pretty soon," he confessed, "I am going to cry like oneabee. The fines' man in this worl', the fines' man, I am a-tellin' you, is sick; he is pretty dam' sick. He is goin' to die! *Aie!* I jump on top my bes' horse, an' I ride like hell, more than one hundred and feesty miles, I ride. An' so, here I am—an' he is already dead!" He put his head down on the bar and let his tears run freely.

Cole Cody looked at the bowed shoulders a moment, then very gently set a large hand on them.

"I'm sorry, Porfirio," he said in a voice as gentle as his heavy hand.

Porfirio jerked up his head, tossed back his black mane of hair, snatched up his glass.

"We drink together, you and me, Señor Codito! To one gr-reat gentleman! To one of the soldiers of the good God Himself! To Don Señor Early Bill Cole! To him, forever and ever! To Don Señor Early Bill Cole!"

THEN Cole Cody gripped Porfirio by the shoulders.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded sharply. "Early Bill Cole? Of the King Cole Ranch? You say he is dead?"

"Only two days ago, Don Codito. And so I am two days too late to see him one more time. He—"

"But I had a letter from him, Porfirio, only a few days ago! And he's dead now?"

"He was old, señor, and he was sick, and everbod' has sometime to die. But he was tough, too, like saddle leather! Maybe he would live another ten years, who knows? Then some sneak shoots him out of the dark!" He rolled his



wet black eyes heavenward. "I am praying the good God, Don Codito, that some day I find out who did that to that nice good old man!"

Here was news! Cole Cody stood frowning, telling himself that all along this had been a funny how-de-do.

**P**OLITELY Cody removed his own hat, and the two drank. Then, with that darting swiftness so characteristic of him, Porfirio snatched Cody's glass and tapped it smartly with the haft of his evil-looking knife, rendering it into splintered fragments. Before the bartender could bear down on him, he had repeated the performance with his own glass.

"Hey, what the hell!"

Porfirio slammed down a ten-dollar gold coin.

"I pay for the glasses and for the drinks too, señor," he said quietly, and the bartender, having taken stock of Porfirio's eyes and on his knife, let the incident pass.

"Set 'em up again," said Cody.

"No more wrecking glasses?"

"No." He and Porfirio touched glasses.

"I'm sorry, Porfirio," said Cody gently. "Sorry you've lost a friend. What are you going to do now? Going home?"

Porfirio shrugged. "What else to do? But I am not going too quick. You see, señor, a long time ago this Señor Cole told me any time I liked, I could come to live and die in his rancho. So this time I thought to come and stay. You know my little place, only one hundred and sixty acres? I sold him. That is why I have some money left in my pocket. So there is no hurry I go back. A few days I am going to stay. Who knows? If somehow I can find out who the man was that shot him—"

"I see. Well, Porfirio, I won't be seeing you for a while. I'm off early in the morning. But first come have some supper with me. We'll talk."

So Cody and Porfirio Lopez dawdled over their supper in one of Bald Eagle's little restaurants, for the better part of an hour, and thereafter set out to see the town. Cody was about to call it a night and go off to bed when he was accosted by a lean and wiry old man who constituted something of a picture, with his mane of snowy hair and mammoth, unpruned white mustache. None other, in fact, than Mr. Arthur Henry Pope—the Judge.

"Mr. William Cole Cody, I believe?" he said sonorously.

Cole Cody looked the man over, and nodded. "That's my name, sir," he said.

"And I, sir, am Arthur Henry Pope. I know something about you—not much, but something. And I'd be glad to shake hands, sir."

Cody obliged him.

"I'd like a few words with you, Mr. Cody," said the Judge then, "in private."

"I'm with a friend—"

"The matter is of importance. Also of an entirely private nature—"

"Go 'long with him, Don Codito," said Porfirio, and began a discreet withdrawal. "He is a man they call the Judge here. He is all right, because they tell me he was a very good friend of Don Early Bill." Then Porfirio bolted, headed for the bar, again flourishing his colorful bandana.

"What is it?" asked Cody.

"I have taken a room for you at the hotel, where you'll want to stay overnight. Will you step over with me?"

"Certainly," agreed Cody, his curiosity now riding high, and the two went out together. Not a word was spoken by either until after they arrived at the hotel. As they entered the front door Cody caught a glimpse of the girl of the stage-coach; she and her aunt were going up the stairs from the lobby, and were escorted by a gray old man of a like vintage with the Judge's. The girl, however, looked through him as she might have looked through a window without noticing it.

**A** BIT earlier that evening, the Judge and Doc Joe having a few moments together on their porch after Doc Joe had tinkered with his new patients, the Judge had been led to remark:

"Old Early Bill, damn his ornery hide, having sworn by all that was good and holy he'd get him his fun after he was dead, ought to be laughing his fool head off now! It's a mess, Doc."

In his turn Doc Joe had snorted. "The fools were you and me, Judge," he growled. "We ought to have stood up on our hind legs and told him to go to hell! . . . Well, I reckon that's where he is now—and serve him right."

All this was because before his demise old Early Bill had exacted their promises to carry out his bidding: If he died before his "heirs" arrived, the Judge and Doc Joe were to look out for the two, and were to tell them just as much as Early Bill wanted told, not a single syllable more. Doc Joe was to explain mat-

ters to the girl; the Judge was to do likewise for young Cody. And they were not to stick their noses unduly into subsequent happenings. "Let nature take its course!" old Bill Cole had chuckled.

"Dammit, man," the Judge had once started to expostulate, "if you're trying to set a trap to make these two young folks marry each other, if you're set on bribing 'em to do just that, why not say in your will—one will, dammit!—that they are—"

That was as far as old Early Bill had let him go.

NOW the Judge and Doc Joe, having in due course learned that both Cole Cody and Ann Lee were on the stage, were faithfully if irreverently carrying out orders.

Thus, while Doc Joe was expounding to a round-eyed, breathless girl and her quietly attentive Aunt Jenifer in one room of the Bald Eagle Hotel, the Judge was letting head and ears of the cat out of the bag for the astounding of William Cole Cody in another.

"And that's the way of it," concluded Doc Joe, glad to be at the end of the crazy business. He opened a carpet-bag at his feet, took from it an old iron box and set it down on Miss Ann Lee's knees.

"But—but—" the girl sputtered. "I can't understand it! This Mr. Early Bill Cole you are talking about—why, I don't know him! I never heard of him! There is some mistake. It must be some other girl, maybe, named Lee."

"There may be a lot of mistakes in this whole deal," the old doctor grunted, "but that's not one of them. You're the girl, all right—haven't you got the key?"

"The key! Why, of course I have!" She jumped up, the box in her hands, ran to the walnut bureau and extracted her purse. "Here it is. He sent it to me with a letter that made me terribly curious, saying some things, half-saying some others, leaving out the things I was dying to know!"

"That would be old Early Bill for you," said Doc Joe tartly. "And I reckon that's the key, all right. You might try it."

She was all eagerness and excitement, and her fingers wouldn't behave properly. At last, however, she got the key in one of the locks. It fitted! It turned easily.

"It is the right key!" she exclaimed, and tried it in the other lock. Doc Joe watched her shrewdly as she struggled

with the thing. "Something's the matter with the crazy thing," she said, baffled. "Will you try it, Doctor?"

He shook his head. "No use, Miss Ann. One thing I didn't tell you: Your key fits only one of the two locks. There's another key. It's being kept by someone else. A man that old Early Bill trusted it to. You can't open your box until he shows up."

"Why, isn't that funny! Who is this man? Is he here in Bald Eagle? When will he give me the other key?"

Doc Joe was already edging toward the door.

"You take mighty good care of that box, Miss Ann," he said hurriedly. "Just you remember that it's worth a power of money! The whole King Cole Ranch is in there—and a heap of gold and greenbacks besides! Just you take mighty good care of it, Miss Ann. And now, good night to you, Miss. And to you also, Miss Jenifer," he said, and ducked out and fled.

He left Ann Lee fairly dancing with thwarted curiosity. "I could *scream*!" she told Aunt Jenifer.

"So I notice," said Aunt Jenifer mildly. "But don't you dare." She got up and began unfastening a lacy flounce about her throat. "As for me, my pet, I could sleep. It's been quite a day, if you ask me."

"*Sleep!*" wailed little Ann Lee. "I was never so excited—" She began shaking the box, holding it to her ear. "I bet the darned thing is empty!" she exclaimed petulantly.

"Nope, you won't find it empty. And when you told Doc Joe, my pet, that you had never heard of Early Bill Cole, you maybe thought you were telling the truth, but you weren't. But it was a long time ago—maybe when you were five years old! Can't very well blame you for disremembering! He was the finest friend your daddy ever had. That's why all along I favored your doing what he said in his letter. It's my notion, Ann Lee, that he's made a very rich young woman of the schoolmistress of Long Valley School." Then Jenifer actually yawned.

AND in that other room under the same roof, the Judge had finished imparting to young Cody all the facts in the case which he had been authorized to make fairly clear. Cody had heard him out in silence, his face stilled to expressionlessness. And when the Judge



grew silent, Cody sat on a moment or two, pondering.

"Thanks, Judge," he said. "I guess that's all you can tell me? Wouldn't do much good to start asking questions?"

The Judge rather liked him for that. He shook his head.

"Come to me later, if you want to," he said. "I'm hoping that things will work out all right for you. Maybe they will. That's what that infernal old devil wanted. Nope, my boy; nothing to add. You just poke on out to the King Cole Ranch tomorrow. 'Night, Cody."

Cody showed him to the door, then came back and sat on the edge of his bed and looked over the letter he had brought along with him, the mystifying communication from a perfect stranger. Old Early Bill Cole. King Cole of the King Cole Ranch. And he himself was William Cole Cody—

"It's got me stumped," said William Cole Cody. "And somehow, though I never knew the old pirate, I'm downright sad he's dead."

He pocketed letter and key, and went out to find Porfirio.

## CHAPTER EIGHT



IT was in no wise strange that the first human being in Bald Eagle to be wide awake and up and about was Miss Ann Lee, and that the second was Miss Jenifer Edwards. The two breakfasted when it was not yet full day, at the Chinese restaurant on the corner. Then in all haste to the livery-stable for a buggy—and then at a good round clip for the two-hour drive out to the King Cole Ranch.

Their road, narrow and crooked and steep at times, led them through a shadowy pass and brought them up to the rim of a broad and softly undulating plateau; here was water, plenty of it, for it was from this tableland that the creek which they had been following spilled down into Sunlight Valley, and the plateau toward the north became a sort of valley itself, with forested mountainous slopes hanging over it upon the east, with a bulwark of rugged hills, running down in a long broken spur from the higher ranges shouldering up, also black with timber.

A herd of horses, young mares with their colts, pricked forward their ears and watched them from a meadow deep in grass and sprinkled with the flowers which had not departed with passing spring; from afar they heard the sonorous, lusty bellowing of a bull; through a break in the timber across the creek they saw a small herd of fat cattle.

THEN finally, there upon its gentle knoll, its whitewashed adobe walls a snowy, gleaming white in the distance under the eastern sun, the old Casa of the Estradas, the home for many a year of Bill Cole, was like an alabaster palace out of a fairy tale—or so declared Miss Ann Lee, athrob with anticipation.

The low, massive building was surrounded by a wall akin in construction to itself, a wall of adobe, whitewashed. There was a hitching-rail under an oak. The wall was pierced by narrow gateways through which glimpses of an unkempt tangle of orchard and garden, ill-kept and picturesque, were afforded. Ann Lee, leading the way, her carpet-bag containing the precious iron box caught tight under her arm, threw open a gate and hurried along one of the paths radiating from the old house; and Aunt Jenifer, her cheeks almost as pink as her niece's, her eyes almost as bright, came hurrying after her.

The place seemed deserted. Unconsciously on tiptoes, the girl approached the arched doorway confronting her and lifted her hand almost timidly to the dangling bell-cord. She gave it a quick tug; within the house a bell clanged, and she started back at the sound.

No one came.

In their talk last night with Doc Joe, neither one of them, with so much else to think about, had thought to ask who was occupying the old home, now that Early Bill Cole had left it.

"Try it again, Ann," said Aunt Jenifer. "It's kind of early, you know. If there's anyone here they might be asleep yet."

She herself reached for the bell-cord and gave it an emphatic yank, setting the bell echoing through the house. A man's voice called out:

"Hello, who's there?" And then, without awaiting an answer: "Wait a shake: I'll be right out."

"I wonder who he is? A caretaker, maybe?"

At long last they heard a heavy bar let down, and the door opened slowly and only a dozen inches or so. A tall young

man looked out at them. He was fully dressed and booted, and had buckled on his cartridge-belt from which two large-caliber guns depended. And all this struck them both as a bit queer; surely they had awakened him, and he had taken time for this full equipment.

Although they could not discern him over-clearly, he had no difficulty in seeing what they looked like. Instantly he threw the door wide open and spoke affably, saying:

"Good morning, ladies! This is a surprise! You're twice as welcome as the birds in spring. Come in, won't you?"

THEY entered a trifle hesitantly—the house was so dark and, at the moment, somehow sinister and forbidding. But that was only because all the shades had been drawn. He said pleasantly, "Just a second and we'll have some light in," and went to one window after another, flipping up the shades. The sunlight streamed in joyously; of a sudden it became a genial and friendly room, aforetime the homely yet dignified main *sala* of the old Spanish house, the fitting lair of late years of that old bachelor Early Bill Cole. The red-and-black Navajo rugs were gay and warm, the few chairs deep and comfortable.

And now they could see Rance Waldron clearly. "He's a handsome devil," thought little Ann Lee. "He looks nice and friendly, though, and I like him." And Aunt Jenifer formed her own impression: "How shrewdly, almost suspiciously, he is looking at us! That man has something on his mind!"

He offered chairs, and they sat down.

"I am Ann Lee and this is my aunt, Miss Jenifer Edwards," said Ann. "We had an invitation from—from Mr. William Cole, to visit him here. We got to Bald Eagle only last night, and now—well, here we are!"

"I see." He nodded and regarded her gravely. "You have heard—"

"Oh, yes! We are terribly sorry, of course—even though we didn't know Mr. Cole personally. But we thought we'd come on out to the ranch, anyhow—"

He nodded again; he seemed, she thought, sympathetically understanding.

"I am taking care of things right now," he said. "I was lucky to get here just before my uncle died—the very day, in fact; if I'd come a couple of hours later, I'd have been too late."

"Your uncle?" spoke up Aunt Jenifer. "Old Bill Cole was your uncle?"

Rance made a little deprecatory gesture.

"I've always called him that," he said easily. "Not an uncle exactly, but related. I am, I believe, his next of kin—his only kinsman, in fact. I am Rance Waldron; my mother and the old man were cousins. It's because of that I am staying on here. Unless there is a will, and I don't believe he ever made a will, I suppose I am the next owner here."

At the mention of a will, Ann's lips were parted to speak up, but by the time he had added a final clause, she had become conscious of Aunt Jenifer's eyes stabbing warningly at her. And so she sat very still, wishing for the first time that she had made Doc Joe come along out here with them.

Aunt Jenifer said: "It's a mighty nice place out here. He wanted us to visit him for a while. We've come a long way, too—over a hundred miles. We got to town last night on the stage."

WHAT she was driving at was obvious enough, and there didn't seem very much he could do about it. He said with a semblance of heartiness:

"Well, the thing that counts is that you're here now! And I am glad that I happened to be on hand to welcome you in my uncle's place. I'll bet you haven't even had breakfast yet. I know I haven't."

"You're a late sleeper," said Aunt Jenifer.

"I worked late last night, going over some papers. Naturally there will be a lot to do in order to get everything straightened out. I suppose I'll have to call a lawyer in, but that can come later, after I've ransacked the place for all papers, accounts, deeds or notes or whatever turns up. The old man, I've a notion, didn't care whether he kept such things straight or not. But how about a cup of coffee and some bacon and flap-jacks?"

"We had a bite before we left Bald Eagle," said Aunt Jenifer, "but I do declare I would like another cup of coffee."

"I'm all alone here," said Rance. "If you can stand for the sort of cooking I can do—"

"Will you show me the way to the kitchen?" asked Aunt Jenifer. "I'll be glad to get breakfast for you."

"Say, that's great!" said Rance.

He showed them the kitchen, a room big enough for a barn, with an enormous



cook-stove. Rance got the fire going while Aunt Jenifer was looking around for something to use for an apron.

"Now," said Aunt Jenifer, sleeves rolled back on a pair of pretty white arms and a clean sugar-sack pinned about her waist, "you can skeddaddle, and I'll call you when things are ready."

"Fair enough," said Rance. "I'll go clean up—haven't even washed my face or combed my hair yet!" And he hurried away; they heard a door close, then, from some farther room, another door.

Ann came close to the stove.

"What are we going to do?" she whispered. "He is related to Mr. Cole; he thinks he is the owner now; he never heard of any will, and— He is terribly good-looking, isn't he, Aunt Jenny? I like him, don't you? And it's going to seem like stealing from him—"

"So he is good-looking, is he?" sniffed Aunt Jenifer, hunting for the coffee-pot. "Well, so was our stage friend of yesterday, Mr. Cody, wasn't he?"

"I would be just as glad," said Ann biting, "if you never mentioned that man to me again!"

"And you like our new friend, do you? That's real nice, and it's Christian too, to like people and strangers at your gate, and all."

"Why, Aunt Jenny! You *don't* like him! Why?"

"I haven't said any such thing. And if you're asking why—well, just you wait and watch, my pet. He remembers to wash his face and hands, and he remembers about breakfast, and he doesn't forget to shut doors after him, and he doesn't forget to bar his door at night and pull the shades down—but what I want to know is this: Is he going to forget to put our horse in the barn and give it some hay!"

**B**Y the time Rance Waldron returned to them—again they heard the soft closing of at least two doors marking his progress—the table was set under a sunny window and breakfast was ready. He was hatless this time, and had combed his hair. He smiled and said briskly: "Ah! This is the life!" Yet it struck the observant girl that it was just his lips that smiled, and that there was a hint of irritation in his eyes.

"So you came in by stage last night?" he said as they sat down.

Ann nodded, and told him of their adventure on the mountain road, of the fallen tree and the attempted hold-up,

warming to the recital as all its details thrilled through her again.

Rance heard her out without interruption, then said thoughtfully: "It's a funny sort of thing, isn't it? Why do you suppose they wanted to stick up the stage if it wasn't carrying a strong-box? What do you suppose that little man—what did you say his name was? Jenkins?—what do you suppose he had on him?"

"We didn't find out," Ann told him. "He was badly hurt; he didn't say anything. It must have been a lot of money, though, and the robbers must have known about it somehow."

"And they made their escape clean? Without stopping any lead?"

"We couldn't be sure. One of the men—one of the men on the stage thought he had hit one of them. But you couldn't really believe a word he said! Most likely he was just bragging about what a fine shot he was!"

**F**OR a time talk drifted aimlessly. As they rose, Rance said:

"Well, now, with things as they are, what do you ladies plan? It must be a terrible disappointment for you not to find your intended host here to receive you. Are you going home right away?"

Aunt Jenifer began scraping and piling the dishes. Ann hesitated a moment, not knowing just what to say. But she did know that she meant to remain here, at least until she found out whether all Doc Joe had told her was sober fact.

"He asked us to stay here indefinitely. We have made our plans—so I suppose we will stay awhile anyhow. You won't mind, will you?"

In his turn he, too, hesitated. Then he exclaimed, almost yet not quite sounding cordial: "Why, I could wish for nothing better on earth than to have you stay here for a year! But I'm afraid you'd find things awfully dull and dreary. Suppose you rest up awhile and we have a bit of a chat? I want to know you and your aunt better, no matter what happens."

He showed her the way into the patio, flooded now with golden sunshine, Aunt Jenifer saying: "You go ahead, Ann; I'll come along as soon as I finish the dishes. . . . No! I don't want anybody in my way 'helping' me!"

"Do you mind," said Rance when they were outside, "if I leave you a few moments? As I told you, I was going through a lot of pretty badly messed-up papers and accounts last night. Part of

the mess I've got fairly well in mind right now; I think twenty minutes more with it and I could put it away ship-shape. I hope you don't mind?"

He hurried away, stopped and headed back to the kitchen.

"I never tasted such coffee," he told Aunt Jenifer. "I'm off to my room for a little more study of those papers; I think I'll take another cup along with me." And carrying the full cup, he departed.

She stopped what she was doing and stood with her head tipped to one side, listening with all her ears. She had noticed something: before, he had put two spoons of sugar to each cup—this time four. She nodded complacently to herself when she heard for the third time the soft closing of doors.

"Man or woman company, which?" she asked herself. "I wonder! And what's he scared of?"

Ann, in the patio, picked a yellow rose and set it in her hair. "That's an old Spanish rose," she told herself. "And yonder's a moss rose. Funny that a man like old Mr. Early Bill Cole kept them alive! Oh, I wish we'd got here in time!"

Only a moment did she loiter in the patio, for her troubled thoughts kept darting away. Suddenly she scurried back into the house.

"Aunt Jenny," she cried reproachfully, "why don't you help me? I don't know what to do! He doesn't want us here—he has as good as told us to go—"

"Well, we're not going! Or are we?"

"Of course not! Not, anyhow, until we find out about everything."

"I don't reckon he'll try to throw us out bodily," said Aunt Jenifer. "Just because he might be somehow related to old Bill Cole doesn't give him the right. . . . You might lend a hand, now that you've come back, at wiping the dishes."

ANN snatched at a dish at the edge of the table in such fashion, that it slipped through her fingers and crashed to the floor.

"Darn the thing!" she cried hotly. "Darn everything! . . . Oh, why did that poor Mr. Early Bill have to go and die?"

"He was an old man and he was sick, and on top of that somebody shot him. That's why."

"You know I didn't mean it that way!"

"Shush! Here comes Mr. Rance again."

Rance returned and stood in the doorway, looking in upon them gravely.

"I decided to put everything aside for a while," he said. They saw instantly that his mood had altered, hardened.

"You see," he went on, "this is really no place for you people at this particular time. I couldn't pretend to make it pleasant for you—under the circumstances. What I should like very much would be for you to come back out here in a few days and be my guests. I'll be coming into Bald Eagle; you'll be staying there at the hotel for a while? I could pick you up later, and bring you out again."

"My! You do sound hospitable!" said Aunt Jenifer.

HE frowned at that. "My dear lady," he said curtly, "just how hospitable I sound has nothing to do with it. You were invited, you tell me, by old Bill Cole. Well, he's dead and gone. Were circumstances different—did I not have so much on my hands—"

"Mr. Waldron!" cried the girl, her cheeks flaming. "I hadn't meant to say anything like this, but I will now—"

"Count four and twenty, Tatticorum," said Aunt Jenifer warningly.

"I won't! I've counted enough already! Mr. Waldron, it goes against the grain to come the first time into Mr. Early Bill's home and start talking like this, but how can I help it? You are distantly related to him, yes, but—did you ever hear of his making a will?"

"A will?" He stared at her, and she thought that his eyes narrowed speculatively. "So he did make a will, did he? You don't mean you're the lucky one?"

"Maybe I am!"

"Maybe?" He gave her a shrug. "Just what does that mean? And I didn't even know that you and my uncle were old friends! Just how long and how well did you know him?"

"I never saw him in my life and you know I didn't! But—"

"This will, now? What are its terms, young lady? When was it made? And where is it now?"

"It—" But she bit the words back. (She couldn't tell him: "It's right here in this room! It's locked up in an old iron box in my satchel yonder! There are two keys to the box, and I've got only one! For a minute I wondered if you had the other one!") No, she must not say that.)

He laughed shortly.

"Really, Miss Leel! Now, look here; if there's any will, we'll talk about it



when it turns up. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that there isn't any. Also I know that he was going to make one—but he didn't have time! He died first! Meantime, as next of kin, I am taking care of things here. I'm sorry that I can't ask you to stay. Really, I am sorry!"

"We're not going!" cried the girl. "I won't budge, for one. He wasn't your uncle, anyhow, just some sort of distant cousin or something. And he didn't like you! Neither do I! I've come over a hundred miles, and at Mr. Early Bill's invitation—and here I stay!"

Rance's voice sharpened.

"Finished? Good! Now you listen to me—"

"What goes on here?" asked a man's voice, very cool and calm, almost at a drawl, yet quietly emphatic.

It was Cal Roundtree, old Early Bill's foreman. Hat in hand, he came in from the patio, stepping softly on his toes because of his spurs.

"IT'S nothing I can't take care of, Roundtree," said Rance curtly. "Any time that I need you, I'll let you know."

"Thanking you kindly," said Cal Roundtree, and then stood pulling one end of his mustache, then the other, while his serene eyes regarded the two women with the frankest interest. "Mornin', ladies," he greeted them. "Me, I'm Roundtree, Calhoun Roundtree, used to be foreman for old man Cole." He appraised the older woman at his leisure, then transferred his investigations to the girl, and his eyes brightened. He bethought himself to take off his hat. "It might be," said Cal Roundtree, sounding friendly, "that you're Miss Ann Lee, come up here to see Early Bill?"

"Why, yes! How did you know?"

"I had a mite of a talk with him a few days ago, shortly before he petered out," said Cal. "He said as how he was expectin' comp'ny. It would be you, and with you, maybe, your aunt—Miss Jenifer Edwards, ma'am?" he asked in that gentle voice of his.

Aunt Jenifer nodded.

"Pleased to meet you ladies," said Cal then, and offered a horny, toil-blackened hand. "You're right welcome, that's what Early Bill says I'm to say to you, and to make yourselves to home long as you care to tarry. He says likewise he's most damn' sorry not to be able to be here to shake you by the hand, him bein' called away to keep a date he mustn't be

late at." He cleared his throat and clapped on his hat. "I happened to see the horse and buggy. First, I thought maybe the horse might like a drink of water and a forkful of hay; next, I says to myself: 'That's a livery-stable rig from Bald Eagle. It's comp'ny!' . . . And I reckoned it might be you ladies."

Rance Waldron heard him out, his face a hot congested red when at last he said in a repressed voice bespeaking fury:

"Roundtree, when you're wanted here at the house, I'll let you know. I'm taking care of things up here, understand?"

Cal Roundtree regarded him a thought distastefully, a thought humorously.

"I'm putting the buggy-horse in the barn, Waldron," he said, unruffled. "You better step along with me a spell—you and me need a little talk together. Just the two of us."

Waldron started to flare up; so much was obvious. With an effort he kept himself in hand.

"Come ahead," he snapped out. "It's time to come to an understanding."

Cal started to go, then turned and came back. "Either of you ladies know how to shoot a gun?" he asked gently.

"Ann, there," said her aunt, "can shoot your eye out at fifty yards!"

Cal chuckled. "Me, I'll make a point not gettin' ornery around you, ma'am," he told Ann. He pulled a forty-five up out of its holster, stepped across the threshold of the kitchen and dropped the gun to the table. "Any time you want anything," he said, "you just blaze away with that; I'll be down around the corral somewhere, anyhow not too far off to hear it. . . . Like Early Bill said, make yourselves to home, ladies." And he departed, stepping softly, along with the scowling Rance Waldron.

"I like *him*," said Ann Lee when the two had gone. "Isn't he—"

"Hmph! You like 'em all at first, then hate 'em! But shush and come here! There's something I want to find out while that Rance party is out of the way. It won't take two shakes."

THE old house was built along three sides of the deep, rectangular patio; a sort of corridor, roofed over with tile, skirted the patio along those three walls, and several doors from this corridor gave entrance to various rooms. Jenifer led the way she had seen Rance take when he had marched off with the cup of coffee down the corridor to the first door, then in. That door she had heard close

after him, both going and coming. Now she hastened to it and tried it. She swung about with a gleam in her eye—a positive twinkle. It was just dawning upon Miss Jenifer Edwards that she was in for the time of her life!

"Locked!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "Just as I thought! Him and his papers, his accounts and deeds and the like, sitting up all night together! He's an awful liar, that man! And if he aint anything worse than a liar, I aint your dear Auntie Jenifer!"

They returned quietly along the corridor, back into the sunny patio.

"What does it all mean, do you think?" whispered the girl. "I'm—I'm sort of scared, Aunt Jennyl!"

Aunt Jenifer jerked her head about and cupped a hand to her ear.

"Here comes the rest of the world, I reckon," she said contentedly. "For so far from everywhere, we sure do see folks! Someone on horseback, like he was riding a race. Well, that's the way some folks always ride; just because they're young, maybe, and feel that way. That's how old Early Bill used to ride when he was young. The first time I ever laid eyes on him—"

"Why, Aunt Jenifer! You never told me that you had ever even seen him!"

"There's two or three things in my life, honey," said Miss Edwards dryly, "that I haven't got around to telling you yet! Now who do you suppose this young feller is?"

They waited in the patio to find out. He dismounted out under the big oak, around the corner of the building just out of sight. Then they heard him coming on to the house—and then he came to the big arch giving upon the patio, and saw them and lifted his hat—

Ann Lee gasped at the sight of him, startled. The twinkle came glinting back into Aunt Jenifer's eye. . . . Here came the young man of the stage, Mr. William Cole Cody.

sion that he was no whit less amazed to see her here than she was to see him.

"Well!" she exclaimed, and in a flash achieved a very creditable imitation of a scornful and haughty heroine she had seen not too long ago in a melodrama enacted by a traveling troupe at the opera house in San Carlos, "Of all things! If you think for one single minute, Mr. Cody, that either my aunt or myself has anything whatever to say to you, you are sadly mistaken. Come, Auntie, let's go in the house. It's nicer in there."

"Good morning, Mr. Cody," said Aunt Jenifer, smiling in friendly fashion. "Lovely morning, aint it?"

Mr. Cody, having regarded her niece with his head tipped sidewise and his eyebrows cocked high, grinned back at Aunt Jenifer every bit as friendly as she.

"You're right!" he told her enthusiastically. "Take this morning just as it is, you couldn't beat it with a ten-foot pole. The sun's shining, notice? And the sky is as blue as anything. The air, now, it's all shot full of sunshine, and you can smell the pines and the green grass, and you just get a whiff of wood smoke out of the chimneys—"

"Coming, Aunt Jenifer?" asked a cool, distant-seeming Ann Lee.

Whether Aunt Jenifer exactly tipped Mr. Cody a sly wink, or whether perhaps she merely squinted an eye against the sun, looking his way, is a question. She said meekly to her niece without in the least looking meek, "Coming, my pet," and followed along to the door which Ann was holding open.

"Just a minute there!" Cody called after them. "Me, too—I'm coming in!"

Aunt Jenifer crossed the threshold, then stopped to watch events. Ann stood squarely planted in the door, facing the invader like Horatius at the bridge.

"I don't think you have any business here, Mr. Cody," she said crisply. "You are not invited, and you are not coming in. And I never want to see you again. Do you understand? Or must I say it again?"

"Can you get it through your head," said a very rude William Cole Cody, "that you and I, far apart as the poles in everything else, agree right up to the hilt on one thing? That we never want to see each other any more than we have to, and let's hope that today wipes the slate clean. Just the same, I am coming in, and I am going to stay for a spell, and—"

## CHAPTER NINE

IF Ann Lee had not been such a precipitate, hair-trigger sort of creature, a lovely little package of all sorts of unmanageable impulses, she must have marked in Cole Cody's startled expres-



"Like fun, you are!" Ann cried angrily. And stepping swiftly backward, she slammed the door in his face.

He set his hand to the latch just in time to hear her drop the oaken bar into place. He swore gently under his breath, strode purposefully along the corridor edging the patio, hunting for another door. He found it just in time to have it slammed, good and hard. He hastened his step and heard light steps running. So he too ran.

That door was already fastened. He wasted no time at all on it, but spun on his heel and dashed for the kitchen end of the house. Little Ann Lee, hearing him, ran too, but the long-legged Cody was ahead of her by several safe yards. He burst into the kitchen and halted there, briefly triumphant, while he could hear her racing feet.

They looked at each other across the room.

"You get out!" she cried in an anger that made her beautiful for any man, not likewise angry, to gaze upon.

"Like hell I will," retorted Cody.

Behind Ann Lee, Aunt Jenifer appeared. She wasn't even smiling, yet she was having the time of her life. Ann Lee, close to her wit's end, remembered the recent visit of the amiable Mr. Calhoun Roundtree, remembered in a flash the gift he had made her. What more could any beleaguered girl ask?

SHE fairly leaped upon it, snatched the weapon up and, her eyes very bright along its barrel, looked at Cole Cody disquietingly.

"Get out!" she said again. "I mean it. You get out or I'll kill you!"

"Better look out, Mister," said Aunt Jenifer's gentle voice. "Our little vixen can shoot like a sharpshooter—and she's just in the mood."

Cody began to laugh—and took a forward step, meaning to force the gun down, to take it away from her, then to have a sensible word with the obviously sensible Miss Jenifer Edwards.

Ann Lee, desperate now, shrilled another word or two of defiance:

"Stop! I tell you—"

In the quiet kitchen the explosion sounded like a cannon-shot. Down at the corrals Cal Roundtree heard it, quite as he had said he would—Cal Roundtree, who had forgotten to tell the young lady that he had worked with a file on that gun of his until it wanted scarcely more than a puff of your breath to set it off!

A queer, rigid look stamped itself on Cole Cody's face. He stood his ground a minute, staring incredulously.

"That's just to show you!" the girl told him, mocking him with voice and eyes. "Next time I'll kill you!"

He thought that over.

"There won't be any next time," he managed at last. "You see, it's like this—"

THEN, as she began to feel entirely mistress of the situation, thinking he meant to draw back and go his way, he leaped forward, taking half the room in one panther bound, and slapped her gun down just as it roared for the second time. His grasp wrapped about her wrist, twisting her arm so that she screamed in pain, and the gun dropped to the floor. He let her go, stooped and caught the weapon up and hurled it far out through the open door behind him. Then he set both his hard hands on her shoulders, jerking her toward him, shaking her back and forth so that her hair tumbled down and whipped lashingly across her reddening cheeks.

"You damn' little tiger pup!" he said.

There was a convenient chair. He dropped down into it and pulled her down across his knees. His hand, lifted high, rose and fell, rose and fell, to such effect that in a couple of minutes little Miss Ann Lee received all the thorough spankings she had missed—and needed—these many years.

It was upon such an arresting scene that Cal Roundtree, coming at a dead run, burst, gun in hand. Cole Cody, hand lifted, gazed at him frowningly, little liking the interruption just now when things were quite at their best. To make matters even less to his taste, there was another man looking in over Cal Roundtree's shoulder. Cody brought his hand down for the final *smack*.

"Hey, you!" roared Cal. "What the hell! You there, stranger!"

Promptly Cole Cody gave over what was occupying him and stood up, letting Ann Lee slide off his knees and sprawl on the floor. He stepped toward the newcomers.

"Why, darn you!" Roundtree stormed at him.

Again Cole Cody emulated a springing cat, and his fist came up like lightning, took Roundtree neatly upon the chin, and flung him flat on his back. Rance Waldron went for his gun too, but Cody's hand seemed quicker than the eye: the bronze knuckles landed upon

Rance's nose, and blood spouted, and Rance tottered backward, tripped over Cal's supine body, and went down.

But already Cal was wriggling over, getting on to his hands and knees, then surging up to his feet, and he still had a good grip on a twin to the gun he had loaned Ann Lee. And by this time there was murder in Cal Roundtree's soul.

But he had lost a precious second or two. Cole Cody had now drawn his own gun, and turned it Cal's way.

"Better drop it, feller," said Cody, sounding listless and not greatly concerned. He sat down as though making himself thoroughly at home. "Might blister your fingers."

WALDRON scrambled to his feet, but he did not reach toward his hips, for he, like Cal, was being regarded by Cody's unsmiling eyes.

"Look here, pup," said Cal, his hand hanging, the muzzle of his gun brushing his boot-top. "Seems as though—"

He stopped short, biting his words off clean. He saw that the man lounging in the kitchen chair had turned white under his heavy tan, and he saw something else: a tiny red pool on the floor close to one of the chair-legs.

Cal said, "I'm putting my gun away, stranger; all right?" And he holstered it with Cody watching him narrowly. He turned half around and said to Rance Waldron: "Stick your gun away, you! No more shooting. It's bad manners, anyhow, shooting in a house, specially with ladies present."

Then he stepped up close to Cody.

"Hurt bad?" he asked.

"Hell, no," said Cody. "If you feel like finishing what we started—"

"It might be fun, at that," said Cal, appearing thoughtful. But he shook his head. "Some other day, though. Like I told you, there's ladies present—"

"A lady," admitted Cole Cody, and looked at Aunt Jenifer. "I ought to have had better manners," he apologized to her. He moved as though to get up; then he thought better of it and sat back.

Ann Lee, her eyes enormous, hot spots of red on her burning cheeks, was on her feet again and staring at the man who had just treated her so; then she too saw the whiteness through his bronze, and the blood slowly dripping into the tiny glistening pool.

"I'm glad I shot him!" she exulted.

But it was hard to go on exulting while she looked at her handiwork.

Aunt Jenifer came to Cal Roundtree's side, bending over the man in the chair.

"Children shouldn't be allowed to play with shooting-irons," said Aunt Jenifer mildly. "They're always getting hurt. If you boys, Mr. Roundtree, will get Mr. Bill Cole Cody to a bed, and if you'll bring me some boiled water and a clean sheet or pillow-case, we'll try to mend him up. I don't think—"

"Mr. *Who?*" demanded Roundtree. "Who'd you say he is?"

"He calls himself Cody, William Cole Cody, and—"

"Me, I'm damned," said Cal, and ran his fingers through his hair, then along the rim of an aching jaw. "If ladies wasn't present, I'd say I'm double-damned." He frowned down at young Cody. "You Cole Cody?" he demanded.

Cole Cody, a trifle dizzy and sickish, demanded:

"Is it any business of yours? I'm not asking *your* pedigree, am I? Suppose you leave me alone."

"You're a nice kid, like a hornet," Cal snorted. "But I got to know: Unless you're ashamed of yourself, and I reckon you ought to be, you tell me whether you're William Cole Cody or not!"

Cody regarded him speculatively. Not a bad sort, it struck him, this nosey individual. So he said curtly:

"I'm Cole Cody—William Cole Cody. Just Cody for short. Now what? Want to do anything about it?"

CAL ROUNDTREE stood rubbing his bruised jaw.

"Yes, I do," he said. "Two things. I want to get your shirt off, see how bad you're hurt and mend you up again. That's one thing. The other is, I want to make you welcome to the King Cole Ranch. Old Early Bill told me to watch out for you, treat you like home folks."

He stuck his hand out.

"Shake, Cody," he said. "Old Early Bill says so. You're welcome; like the old Spanish used to say, the place is yours."

Cody looked up at him; a slow smile twitched at his lips, and his hand went out to clasp Cal Roundtree's. Ann Lee stared at them with all her might.

Aunt Jenifer said, growing impatient: "You, Calhoun Roundtree, I thought you had some sense! Do you want to patch this playmate of yours up? And just look at my nice clean kitchen floor!"

Cal helped Cody to stand. He said, "There's a bed handy in that first room



there," and then was cut short by Cole Cody saying, "Who wants a bed this time of day? We'll keep our boots on, kid."

And Cal muttered, not realizing he was speaking aloud: "Sounds just like old Early Bill! And named Cole Cody! Glory be, I'm going to have my hands full—and I could break old Early Bill's neck for him, ducking out on me like this, leaving me holding the bag! I bet somewhere he's laughing his old head off!"

So he got young Cody as far along as a chair in the living-room and pulled off his shirt.

Ann Lee came close after them.

"YOU'RE not a very good shot, are you?" jeered Cody.

"It's that darned gun of Calhoun's!" she protested. "It does its own shooting when it feels like it. You try it sometime, smarty!"

"Trying to apologizel Meaning you didn't go to do it?" He was still jeering at her.

"Mr. Cody," said Ann, very prim and very polite. "I am sorry, in a way, that I shot you. You see—"

"In a way? That's nice! What way?" snapped young Cody.

"There is such a thing as being humane, or anyhow human," said Ann. "You know very well that you are not welcome here. What's the use pretending? You and I don't like each other—for my part," she exploded, "I hate the sight of you! Get well as soon as you can—and go somewhere else. So, what I mean by being sorry I shot you, it's just that if you weren't all shot up, you could be on your way right now."

He slid out of his chair, the tight bandage about his midriff irking him, and stood up.

"I'm here to stay," he told her flatly. "I didn't come following you, either. If I'd known you were here, maybe I wouldn't have come at all. And not meaning to be tough with you, just the same I can ask you what the devil you are doing here anyhow—at my place?"

"Your place! What on earth are you talking about? Have you gone crazy?"

"Listen, and don't be so smart. You ask, what do I mean by saying this is my place. Well, that's what it is, or anyhow going to be. I'm old Early Bill Cole's heir. This is the King Cole Ranch, and it's mine."

"Why, you—you're worse than that man Rance Waldron! He says it's his

place too—and it's *mine!* Now, Mr. Cody, will you—will you tuck your shirt-tail in, and go climb a tree?"

What Mr. Cody did was scratch his head, thick-thatched with abundant dark red hair, and hold his peace a moment and do a bit of thinking, staring at her all the while. Pondering, he did tuck his shirt-tail in. Also he produced the makings of a cigarette and very slowly, his mind on other matters, rolled his cigarette. And in due course, lighted it.

"It's still reasonably early in the morning," he said. "You've got lots of time to comb your hair and wash your face—go look in a looking-glass, and you'll do both!—and get into Bald Eagle before noon. If the stage doesn't go where you want it to go today, it'll be pretty sure to go tomorrow. So you've got time to listen while I tell you something: Mr. Early Bill Cole, rest his wild soul, being dead now, made up his mind he wanted the right sort of man to take care of the things he had to leave behind him. He nominated me for the job. He even took time to write out a will. He left every thing he had to William Cole Cody. And that's me. Do you begin to get the idea?"

Outside, in the patio, Rance Waldron had stopped at the side of a window, listening; one would have judged, so still and attentive had he become, that he was more than casually interested. At least so deemed Aunt Jenifer, spying on him from a kitchen corner!

And little Ann Lee, after a breathless second, spoke up, and very quietly.

"Mr. Early Bill Cole," she said, "was a gentleman and a very fine man. He was a friend of my father's. He knew that he had to die. So he made his will. It's quite too bad, Mr. Cody, to disappoint you, but Mr. Cole left everything he had—to me. He made a will to that effect, and—and I've got that will! Now—will you get well and go!"

SHE spoke with conviction. There wasn't the slightest doubt she meant what she was saying. The poor little deluded kid—

He moved over to the table, feeling a trifle unsteady and blurry in the head, and sat on the table's edge, one foot swinging.

"We'll soon find out about all this," he said. "I've got a key—a key old Early Bill sent me—"

"A key! Wh—what sort of key?"

"A key that's made to unlock something," he snorted at her. "Are you

and I old friends who tell each other all our hearts' secrets? Are we—"

"Shut up! You talk so darned much and say so little—you make me *mad*! Tell me about your key. Did Early Bill—you say that he sent it to you?"

"Well, what if he did? Maybe you've got the lock it fits! Let's laugh!"

"Maybe I have! And if you've got the other key, I'll show you! I'll show you who owns the King Cole Ranch and all that goes with it! Where's your precious key, Mr. Cole Cody?"

"Where's your lock for it to fit?" he shot back at her.

**S**UDDENLY they were aware of Aunt Jenifer in the doorway, clearing her throat to a warning "Ahem!" Her eyes drifted sidewise toward the window, and managed to jerk their attention in that direction; whereupon Rance Waldron made the best of the situation, tapping on the pane, calling to them:

"What's going on in there? I thought you two would have had enough of each other. Mind if I drop in and join in the powwow?"

He moved away from his vantage-point, and a moment later the doorway framed him.

"I don't think I know you very well," said Cody. "Do you happen to be one of my guests?"

"We met just now," Rance reminded him, cool and insolent. "Guests, you said, didn't you? Whose guests, I can't but ask. You mean I'm your guest, or you're my guest or—just what did you have in mind?"

"It's like this," said Cody, very slow-spoken; right now he was regarding Rance Waldron's empurpled nose and dallying with the thought of taking even more painstaking care of that nose when opportunity afforded. "You heard part of what was said; I guess, out there at the window, you didn't miss a word. So suppose we go on from there. I don't know who you are—"

"Why not get straightened out at the start?" said Waldron reasonably. "I'm Rance Waldron, and just blew in here a few days ago. As far as I know, or anyone else seems to know, I'm next of kin to Early Bill Cole. I had a hunch he kicked off without making any will at all, and in spite of the several mentions of wills that I've heard since, I'm still of that notion. If I happen to be right—well, then, this outfit belongs to me! Got all that, Mr. Cody?"

"Quite a speech," conceded Cody, nodding approvingly. "Yep, I got it. Only, it's my bet you're out on a limb. Here are the three of us, you and Miss Lee and me, all putting in our claims." He made a wry face. "Like so many turkey buzzards sitting on a fence! It makes me sort of sick at my stomach. I got a notion to high-tail out of here and let you folks fight over a dead man's boots!"

"Scat!" cried Ann Lee. "You're overdue some other place!"

He considered at length, then shook his head and looked stubborn.

"No. I'm sticking until I get things straight. Why old Early Bill should make me his heir, I don't know and can't guess. I never knew him, never even saw him. But one thing sticks out: His name was Cole, and I'm Cole Cody! Must be we're related, or something—" And he reached into his pocket, groped a minute and dug up a small flat key. "There!" said Cody. "There's the key to the mystery—maybe! Who'll bring me a lock for my key?"

Ann Lee left the room and came back with her cherished carpet-bag clutched tight. She got it open, ran a hurrying hand into it, plucked out an old black iron box—one with two locks, as anyone might see.

"If your key fits one of these locks—This one! Try it!"

"So that's it, is it?" Cole Cody jeered. "A strong-box with two locks, and you've got a key for one, and are going clean crazy like Pandora and Bluebeard's wife, trying to burglarize it! And no can do—without the other key! Mine! Well,"—and he never spoke more drawlingly,— "there's no hurry, is there? How about waiting until tomorrow?"

**A**NN LEE opened her hand, showing him a key much like his own.

"Here, before witnesses," she said, and her voice sounded as though she had just taken it out of cold storage, iced all over, "if you like, we'll try to open the box and see what we can find. It might be fun—for me! Or, if you like to hang on to your old key, I'm just ready to go get an ax and a cold chisel and bust this little box wide open! Then, whatever I find belongs to me. To do with, Mr. Cody, whatever I darned well please!"

Cole Cody had played poker, and he knew that a bluff can call a bluff any time.

"Like you say, here and now before witnesses!" he scoffed. "You with one



key, me with the right one, let's get it over with. Only when you read the sad news, don't ask to weep on my shoulder!"

"You!" cried Ann scornfully. She set the box down hastily, and shot her key into the proper lock. When the mechanism gave its satisfied responsive click, she looked up at him triumphantly. Little Ann Lee could crowd a lot of things into one swift glance. "I've done it, Mister! How about you? Just four-flushing?"

Cole Cody wondered, himself. Well, here was the time to find out about things. With Ann watching his slightest move, with both the lively Aunt Jenifer and the sardonic Rance Waldron pressing close, he shot the key home. It fitted the old lock. He turned it. Now there was nothing to do but lift the lid and see what, if anything, the old iron box contained.

He and little Ann Lee looked at each other. . . . About that moment, and what followed, Aunt Jenifer wrote two whole pages in her diary.



TWO old porch-sitters from Bald Eagle came skallyhooting out to the King Cole Ranch. They shared what they agreed to call a hunch. Likewise both were scorching with curiosity. They arrived early, just in time to see four people gathered about a table with an old black iron box centering their attention. "Aha!" the two old porch-sitters said simultaneously, and barged in.

Ann emitted a small shrill squeal of delight.

"Doctor Joe! Oh, Doctor Joe, I'm so glad and grateful you came! I'm amongst enemies, cruel, horrid men that would steal a girl's last penny. You come watch, Doctor Joe!"

And Cole Cody, seeing the Judge, said:

"Howdy, Judge! Come guard my interests, won't you? They're not only shooting me up; they're trying to steal my mess of pottage. Keep your eyes peeled, will you, Judge? And I'll buy the drinks."

They got the box open. They saw, first of all, two long, sealed envelopes.

"Well, Mr. Cody," said Ann, and looked and sounded very brave, "the top envelope is addressed to William

Cole Cody. If you care to lift it out, I'll take mine!"

"So you still think there is something in the Santa Claus box for you?" he jeered. "Think that the letter underneath is for Miss Ann Lee? And that it will sort of explain why things didn't come your way?"

"Shall I pick it up for you?" Ann said a trifle waspishly.

He grinned at her, and took the long top envelope out of the box.

Underneath was the one addressed to her. She snatched it, ran her excited eyes over it, flaunted it in his face. Then she tore it open. Her eyes were shining. A glance told her the fairy-tale, the story that she knew would be there! "*To Ann Lee I give and bequeath—all my belongings—the properties known as the King Cole Ranch—*"

"Come, hurry, Doctor Joe!" she cried. "You were right! Look!"

But Cole Cody had spotted the Judge.

"Hey, Judge!" he called cheerily. "Step over, will you? We maybe are going to need arbitration, and I pick you for my sponsor! Ten per cent of the net proceeds, if any, goes to you. How about it? Let's both ride lucky!"

The Judge and Doc Joe looked at each other, thinking: "Here's where a lot of fuss and feathers starts, with maybe hell tied to its tail."

"What in the world is this?" exclaimed Ann Lee. She waved a sheet of paper; there was a bank-note pinned to it. "Listen! It says: '*Little Ann Lee, I sort of kind of liked you. You were mighty sweet to me, little Ann; you were like a flower. I bet you make yourself a lot of trouble though—but all live gals do such! Do me a favor, will you? I made a bet with a crazy galoot name of Josephus Daniel Dodge, generally known far and wide, mostly in low dives and disgraceful places, as Doc Joe. I made the old fool a bet, five hundred dollars, that I'd outlive him. And here I am as good as dead already! Wouldn't that make you mad, lit—*'"

She began to cry, dabbing furiously at her eyes. But she jerked her head up and repeating the last phrase, kept right on reading:

"'*Wouldn't that make you mad, little Ann Lee? Well, it makes me mad, but I lose and I pay. Here's five hundred dollars. Suppose you hand it over to Doc Joe and tell him that anyhow I'll get my laugh, sitting up on a big white cloud with nice pink trimmings and play-*

ing "Home, Sweet Home" on my harp, while I peek down pretty soon and spy on him frizzling down in hell! Thanks, little Ann—and you keep your hair on, and maybe you'll ride lucky! Yours, Bill Cole."

"I'm damned," said Cole Cody softly.

He held up a similar sheet of paper, bank-note attached. He read:

"Hi, Bill Cole Cody! Sorry I missed you; couldn't wait, having other places to go. Now look here, kid, I sort of liked you; anyhow, we had fun together. So you remember old times and do me a kindness, same as I'd do you at a pinch. I made a bet with a dog name of Arthur Henry Pope, most commonly known in and about Bald Eagle as the Judge, five hundred bucks that I'd outlive him. I just simply got tired waiting for the old fool to die; so I lose, and here's the five hundred, and you hand it to the Judge for me, and tell him it was fun dying, so I could make sure him and me would never, never-no-more meet up again—for he's hell-bound along of Doc Joe, and me, I'm always for the High Places! Yeee! On handing it to him, look out he don't claw your hand off, the money-grabbing old coyote! Tell him I hope him and Doc Joe, barging in to town to get drunk together, both choke to death. Luck, kid. Yours, Bill Cole."

Bill Cole Cody blew his nose and glared stormily.

"I—I don't understand," gasped Ann. "I never in all my life once even laid eyes on Mr.—Mr. Early Bill!"

"Me too," said Cole Cody. "He says here— It's a funny thing. I never knew Bill Cole, never saw him!"

The Judge and Doc Joe looked at each other.

"Don't you kids be fooling yourselves," Doc Joe said crustily. "Old Early Bill Cole was a no-count rambling wreck of wickedness and sin; just the same, he warn't no liar. If he says to Miss Ann she was sweet to him, then she *was* sweet to him, and somewhere he knowed her. If he says to this young Cody that they had fun together—well, they did. Am I right, Judge?"

"Right as rain, Doc," said the Judge.

"WHAT'S all this about wills?" said Waldron, as sharp as a new tack.

"You shut up!" cried Ann Lee. "You and your wills! We're talking about—" She spun on her heel like a small whirlwind. "Doc Joe! Here's your five hundred dollars!"

"Thanking you kindly, miss," said Doc Joe, and took his rightful winnings.

"Well," said Cole Cody, "here's yours, Judge."

The Judge cleared his throat, accepted the bank-note.

"I wish," said young Cody, very austere, "that old Early Bill was here with us now, Judge. Because you sound already like a man choking to death! He'd get him his laugh—"

"He was always laughing, the old fool," snorted the Judge.

"But, as I was saying," Cole Cody went on, "having done with wishing, here is the tall, straight and shining fact of the matter: I've got in my hand a legal-looking paper. It calls itself a will. It gives and bequeaths and *et cetera*, all his belongings and properties and accessories—the King Cole Ranch thrown in—to William Cole Cody, which is me! And could you tell me, Judge, without straining yourself—whose time is it right now to laugh? Mine!"

"Why, you—you—" stammered Ann.

"Let's look it over," said the Judge.

Once again he and Doc Joe were looking at each other.

AND Waldron was as interested as anyone. He said smoothly:

"I might help you folks out, maybe. My uncle—Mr. William Cole, you know—was pretty old. What's the word for it? *Senile*? It's my thought that he was dying and was out of his head—what you call *non compos mentis*—in plain English he was as crazy as a bedbug when he wrote those wall-eyed wills. He told me—he told me fifty times that all he had was going to be mine! Now here's Miss Lee, and here's Mr. Cody, both of them saying they've got a will, giving them the whole works! That sounds kind of funny, don't it? It might pay to see how these wills were dated, and how they were witnessed and all that. Whether, maybe, they were made while the old man was dying, and was so clean off his nut that both wills are worth about—"

He snapped his fingers.

Cole Cody laughed. Ann Lee smiled; it was a tight little, slight little, bright little smile that spelled *Triumph*.

"I'll be glad to have you read this paper, Mr. Waldron," she said.

"Here's a document for your eye," said Cole Cody.

And though both Ann Lee and Cole Cody were speaking to Rance Waldron, they were looking straight at each other.



Waldron, his eyes like gimlets, looked at one will, then at the other. In one everything on earth that Early Bill owned was bequeathed to Ann Lee; it seemed, and was, properly drawn; witnessed by Josephus Daniel Dodge. The other also seemed, and was properly drawn, duly attested by Arthur Henry Pope. The queer thing was that the two wills were of the same date!

Waldron laughed. He flung the papers down on the table.

"They're not worth the price of a torn cigarette paper," he said. "Any court, any man not altogether an idiot, will tell you that the old man was crazy when he signed them." He wasn't looking at either Ann Lee or Cole Cody, but his eyes flickered back and forth between Doc Joe and the Judge. "You two witnessed these documents; well, you know that when a man gives all he's got to one person, *and at the same minute* gives it all to another person, he doesn't give anything to anybody! Am I right?"

The Judge cleared his throat and pulled at his abundant white mustache. Doc Joe touched his thin gray hair meditatively with his finger-tips.

"Well?" demanded Rance Waldron.

When no one else seemed to have anything to say, Aunt Jenifer spoke up:

"Have all you gentlemen had breakfast?" she asked. "Wills and things, you know, can wait longer than appetites."

The Judge's laugh, when he turned it loose, was a jolly sound to hear.

"Wisdom speaks when Miss Jenifer Edwards opens her lips," he announced with relish.

Young Cody drew the Judge aside with a look, and the two stepped out into the patio to talk. Little Ann Lee hurried to Doc Joe and slipped her hand through his arm. And Rance Waldron, looking from one of them to another, left the room, going hurriedly back to that part of the house where he had locked a door or two.



DOC JOE and the Judge had gone back to town, each with an honestly earned five hundred dollars in his jeans. And as old Early Bill's house was big enough to accommodate a score of peo-

ple, its present inhabitants could all dwell under the one roof without running into each other all the time. Ann was swift in selecting a bright little room at the southwest corner: Aunt Jenifer bestowed her portable *lares* and *penates* in a four-square room adjoining. So Mr. Cole Cody, with his bag in hand, strode through the house to the northeast corner, having computed geometrically that that was as far as he could get from the southeast corner. And Rance Waldron maintained his present quarters, namely in the region of the locked doors, which was at the northwest corner.

RANCE WALDRON was locked up in his own quarters, ostensibly concerning himself with papers and accounts he had found. Ann devoted hours to investigating the house, its various rooms and closets, making a thoughtful study of any little chance object which seemed to her somehow foreign to this locale: In a drawer a gold chain with a locket which she could not open, because a tiny key was required and the key was nowhere to be found, though she sought long for it; in an old album were a curl of dark hair and some pressed flowers! How on earth came such things into old Early Bill's house, into his life?

As for young Cole Cody, he left the house as soon as he had stowed his few belongings in his room, and went down to the outbuildings down by the barn, seeking Cal Roundtree; his wound irked him and he sidled gingerly like a crab. He found Roundtree sitting on a log that had been hauled up to the woodpile, smoking contemplatively, with his wreck of a hat pulled down over his eyes.

"Mind if I perch alongside you?" demanded Cody. "I've just had a long walk and am sort of leg-weary."

"Squat," said Cal Roundtree. Cody lowered himself to the log and reached for his own papers and tobacco, Roundtree eying him narrowly all the while. "What's on your mind, Cody?" he asked bluntly.

"Plenty," Cody told him. "I think I own this outfit now, but I'm not sure of anything. That girl up at the house, she thinks she owns it. On top of all that, there's that Rance Waldron fellow who puts in his claim. Funny, aint it, Cal?"

Cal agreed with a thoughtful nod. Yes, it was funny.

"You see," Cole Cody continued, "I never knew Early Bill Cole. Or if I did know him, as Doc Joe and the Judge

seem to be sure of, then I didn't know I knew him."

"He was a queer old rooster," said Cal Roundtree. "I guess I knew him about as well as anybody ever did: just the same, come right down to it, I aint sure I knew him a damn' bit! He was his own man, body and soul, inside and out, and you never could be sure of him. But this I do tell you: If he left his ranch and money to you, he knew you! He would make it his business to know you. And if he left his belongings to Miss Ann, you can bet your damn' boots he knew her, too."

"Somebody shot him?"

"Yes. I'm just hoping with all my hope-machinery that some day I'll find out who did that for old Bill."

"Tell me about it; all that you know."

ROUNDTREE told the story simply; of the shot fired from the bushes in the early dawn while the old man was standing under his favorite pine; how old Early Bill made his way back to the house; how he stuck it out longer than most men could have done, sending for Doc Joe and the Judge, getting his affairs in shape. Cal gave all the salient details. Then Cody asked:

"When he came to making a will, then, he knew what he was doing? He wasn't delirious?"

"Not Early Bill," vowed Cal Roundtree. "When he stood up, aiming to die on his feet the same way he had lived, his old head was as clear as a bell. You could see it in his eyes. He had a pair of eyes like an eagle's."

"Then how in blazes was it that at one and the same time he gave all he had to me—and gave the same everything to Ann Lee? I've seen both wills, man, and that's how they read!"

Cal shook his head. "He was having him his fun, I reckon. Old Early Bill, come rain or shine, was always a great hand for having him his own fun in his own way." He thought a moment. "Say! It might be that this way he was making sure that you and Miss Ann would marry each other! Maybe that's the way he wanted it!"

"Then you're wrong about him not being crazy," snorted Cody.

They sat silent a little while, soaking in the sunshine. Presently they fell to talking of this and that, and so it chanced that the attempted stage-robbery of the day before was mentioned. And so Cal learned that the attack had been made

against a man called Bucktooth Jenkins, and that Jenkins was now lying in bed at Bald Eagle, pretty well shot up.

"Did they get the money Bucktooth was carrying?" Cal asked anxiously.

"They didn't get anything, unless one of them got a bullet in him! We all wondered what Bucktooth was carrying that they wanted."

"He was carrying ten thousand dollars," said Cal. "It was money he had gone to collect for Early Bill, and he was bringing it home. I know, because Early Bill showed me the letter Bucktooth had wrote him; the letter said he had collected all right, but was staying over a couple of days to visit some relations of his at the old trading-post down by Tilton; said he'd be along on yesterday's stage, bringing the ten thousand bucks with him. But how the devil did anybody else find out about it? Bucktooth aint a man to gab. I knew about it, because when the letter come, Early Bill was near blind with pain, and he just snapped at me like this: 'Oh, hell, it aint anything if it's from that fool Bucktooth. Here, read it to me, Cal.' And he stuck on to that, same as usual: 'If you *can* read!' So I read it, and left it lying on his table when he chased me out to bring him a drink."

"You left it on the table, huh? He probably left it on the table, too. . . . What do you know about this Rance Waldron, anyhow?"

"Nothing. Except I don't like the way he wears his face."

"He could have found the letter and acted on it. Let's see; there were two hold-up men. . . . You knew about Bucktooth's carrying the money."

"You knocked hell out of me once this morning, Mr. Cody. I'd like to do the same for you right now, but being shot up like you are, I'll have to give you time to mend."

CODY laughed and slapped Cal on the knee.

"I was just joshing, and you know it, Cal. Forget it. But if it was Waldron, who would be the other man with him?"

"Better pull your punches when it comes to joshing me about things like that, young feller," Cal growled at him, "or you'll get your ears knocked down. About it being Waldron, dammit, I bet it was! He's been in and out of Bald Eagle a time or two, and from what I hear, he aint got a two-bit piece to his name. And I wouldn't put him above



hog-stealing. But where he'd find a side-kick, him being a Johnny-come-lately hereabouts, I wouldn't know."

"Just who is Bucktooth Jenkins, anyhow? How come that Early Bill sent him on an errand such as that?"

"Bucktooth has been old Bill's handy-man for years. He lived in that little shack over yonder." Cal pointed to one of the several small adobes half hidden by the low drooping branches of a live oak. "He's a good man, and game, and always carried out orders the way he got 'em. Later I'll be riding into town to see how he's making out. If he gets well he ought to be back here, no matter who owns the ranch."

"I'd sort of like to look the ranch over, to see what it's like," said Cody. "But I suppose, the shape I'm in, a horse would shake me plumb to pieces."

"I'll hitch up the buckboard, if you say the word, Cody. A buckboard can go most any place, you know."

IT was while they were giving the matter thought that a man came riding up from the county road, ignoring the ranch-house and striking straight for the two on the log. First Cole Cody recognized the palomino, then the rider, and waved. Here came little Porfirio Lopez, whom he had left last night in town.

Porfirio's white teeth gleamed in a wide grin as he pulled up his horse.

"*Buenas dias, Don Codito! Buenas dias, amigo!*" he greeted the two. "The beeg, roun' worl' is nice place today, no?"

"Light down, Porfirio," invited Cody, "and make yourself at home."

Porfirio swung down lightly, was introduced to Cal Roundtree, and the three chatted. Porfirio had come, it appeared, to visit the grave of the poor old Señor Cole; also, he thought that he might find his other *amigo*—Cole Cody—here. Third, he wanted to poke his nose into things here, maybe to learn what scoundrel it was who had shot Early Bill.

"I would kill him like *that!*" he exclaimed, and crushed an acorn with the high heel of his boot.

Cody explained to Cal Roundtree all about Porfirio.

"He sold his little ranch to come here. I'd like him to stay awhile. If I take over, he's on my pay-roll. Anyhow, he might hole-up here a few days?"

Cal shrugged.

"Me, not owning the place, I can't hire a man," he said. "Likewise, not owning it, I've got no rights chasing a man off.

As far as I go, Porfirio is welcome to stick around."

They fell to talking of all the fun old Early Bill, fun-lover, was missing.

"It's a darn' shame," said Cole Cody, "that the old boy can't be with us, watching all the little merry hell he's kicked up. . . . But it's not a day for sitting still," Cody added. "That's a great idea of yours, Cal, about the buckboard."

"Suits me," said Cal. "Here we go."

He roped two lively young bays in the corral, got them harnessed and hitched to the buckboard while Cody held the reins. And Porfirio rode alongside.

It was a glorious morning such as early summer brings to this land, and the breeze in their faces was sweet with the resinous incense of pines.

"And," explained Roundtree, stretching out his arm to point, then moving it in an arc or some forty-five degrees, "the King Cole Ranch runs on and spreads out over a hell of a lot you can't see from here. You ride through Hide Springs Pass yonder and you come into Long Jim Valley, twenty thousand acres of the finest land for grazing or for hay that a man ever wanted to see; then there's another smaller valley,—a honey,—just over that way across the hills through Sylvia Pass."

"Sylvia Pass?" commented Cody. "Funny name for a mountain pass. How come?"

"You'd have to ask old Early Bill; he named it. Maybe he sort of liked the name."

It was nearly noon when they returned to ranch headquarters. Cole Cody left Porfirio and Cal Roundtree taking care of the horses, and made his way slowly up to the house. He was tired from the trip which no doctor would have consented to, and his present yearning was for a quiet room with a bed in it. Passing a window he got a glimpse of little Ann Lee; their eyes met fleetingly and he marked in passing that her eyes looked bigger than ever and that her face was very serious. He lifted his hat and went on to his corner of the house; he had no way of telling that she had been shocked by the deadly pallor of his face, its haggard, drawn look—and by her stabbing realization that it had been her act which made him like this.

THE hours passed quietly, and yet there was a tenseness in the air which the quiet did nothing to relieve.

Of them all, Aunt Jenifer alone was as cheery as any cricket. At noon she

served a meal: Thick steaks with rich, brown gravy; potatoes, fresh hot bread, good strong coffee, and either apple or apricot pie. Four lively appetites came to the table, which was quite as well, since the four possessors of these appetites hadn't much to say to one another.

THE afternoon passed lingeringly. There was so much to think about, so little to do about any part of it. For the most part, Cole Cody lay in his room, fatigued and weakened by his jaunt in the buckboard; Rance Waldron kept to his room, seldom emerging, and always, as Aunt Jenifer took pains to note, leaving a locked door behind him. Aunt Jenifer herself did a bit of snooping, all over the place but mostly in the neighborhood of Waldron's quarters. As for Ann Lee, she sat in the patio, musing.

Not long after the lamps were lit, all gathered around the dining-table when Aunt Jenifer rang the hand bell for supper. Again the meal was excellent; again conversation died a-borning. At the end of this feast of silence and flow of distrust, Cole Cody again said some sort of polite thanks, and went to his room. After Cody's departure, Rance Waldron sat a little while over his coffee, smoking a cigarette, and made some small endeavor to be agreeable. Aunt Jenifer did not like the man, and made him the curtest replies before she got up to clear the dishes away; Ann Lee seemed absent-minded; and Rance was not long in saying good night and going to his room.

Ann Lee patted a yawn. "Go to bed, kitten," said Aunt Jenifer. "I'll do the dishes and follow along in two shakes. You look as sleepy as a daytime hoot-owl. Me, I'm young and strong and romantic, and I'm going out into the patio to look at the stars. At the moon too, if there is any. Run along, pet."

Ann carried her lamp through quiet empty rooms where shadows seemed to come out of corners and from under tables and chairs, and scurry away like frightened things. In her room it was very still, and the starshine came in through her open windows. She drew the shades down, undressed and slipped into her nightgown and into her big bed. She left her lamp burning on her bedside table, snuggled her curly head deep into the pillow, and passed gently from daydreams to the land of night's dreams.

And Aunt Jenifer, as wide awake as any cat at any mouse-hole, sat for a while

in the patio, listening intently for the slightest sound. Thus an hour passed; then she stole out of her secret place and crept like an agile small shadow out to one of the big live oaks not more than fifty yards from Rance Waldron's outer door. Under the thick-branched tree, heavy with young foliage, it was black dark; here she established herself, seated on the ground, leaning back against the gnarled trunk. She began to yawn and her eyelids to grow so heavy that it required utmost effort and the final exercise of her will-power to get them lifted. But when at last she heard the sound she had waited for so long, her eyes flew wide open of their own accord.

The creaking this time was no ghostly creaking; it told of a door being slowly opened on rusty hinges. It was the door from one of Rance Waldron's rooms. And the steps she heard were no ghostly tread; two men, with the door softly closed and locked after them, were coming out; and one of the men walked scufflingly as though he dragged an injured leg after him.

She hid as best she could behind the dark old oak tree, peering out. The night was clear and there was light enough for her to be sure of two things: One of the men was a stranger to her, and he was hurt or sick. The other man helping him was Rance Waldron.

She strove with all her ears to hear what was said between them, but they spoke a few words only, those in lowered voices. She saw them move, one man lurching and the other supporting him, toward the group of ranch buildings at the foot of the slope, and furtively she followed them. She saw that Waldron had a couple of horses hid in a willow thicket just across the creek; she watched him help his companion up into the saddle; she saw them ride away, heading north; then she ran back to the house.



AUNT JENIFER went straight to Cole Cody's outside door and hammered at it with her knuckles. He was asleep but came awake instantly, and called out: "Who's there? What's wanted?" "It's me, Jenifer Edwards. Dress quick and come out here. Bring your gun."



She heard his bare heels hit the floor. He slid into trousers, shirt and boots, and despite a sore stiffness along his side, went through his routine like a fire-horse.

"Well?" he demanded when he stepped out close to Aunt Jenifer.

"I don't know," she said calmly if eagerly. "I don't trust that Rance Waldron; he's got a mean eye. All day long he has kept his door locked, and all day I've known that he had somebody he's been hiding. I've been watching, figuring with all this secrecy he'd be anxious to get his friend out of the house when he was sure everybody was in bed. Just now he and another man sneaked out and went to their horses, saddled and hidden in a willow thicket."

"What about it?" demanded Cody, about as amiable as most men rudely awakened from a deep sleep all for the sake of a mere trifle. "What affair is it of mine? Or of yours, either?"

"Part of it is this: Rance Waldron has had this man hid in the house behind a locked door all day; that's a mystery, young man, and I don't like mysteries. Then it's shady, sneaking out of the house this time of night, speaking in whispers. And some one shot Early Bill a few days ago; and in case there was no will, Rance Waldron would have inherited everything. Another thing; the stage was held up yesterday; and you fired a few shots at the robbers and thought you hit one of them. And the man with Waldron limped so bad that he could hardly walk. Is that child's chatter?"

"Which way did they ride?" asked Cody.

"Straight north, along the creek on this side."

"You'd better get to bed, Aunt Jenifer. It's dawning on me that you're a pretty wonderful woman, but you can't keep going day and night."

"You bet I'll go to my room, Bill Cole Cody, and lock my door. Darn it, I'm scared. And you come back as soon as you can; I'll hear you, and I'll creep out into the living-room to make sure it is you. Now poke along."

He caught her hand and gave it a squeeze. Then he hurried down to the ranch buildings for a word with Cal Roundtree, and for a horse.

Wakened and apprised of the situation, Roundtree was out of the door still buttoning his overalls and drawing his belt about his lean middle. Cody was ahead of him at the stable; they saddled

swiftly and took the trail Aunt Jenifer had specified, north along the creek.

"If they want to hide, they can make themselves hard to find in this country," said Roundtree. "Just the same, I know the most likely place to look for them, since they must have thought no one had seen them go, and so no one would be following them so soon. Likely they'll get under a roof tonight anyhow, and maybe poke on tomorrow night."

FOR a mile they kept close to the creek, and though they rode swiftly, they heard no sound of hoof-beats ahead. Then Cal swung to the right where a small tributary brook came tumbling down, and presently they passed into the mouth of a steep-walled ravine made shadowy by the tall growth of pines on the ridges and by the dense growth of alders and laurels nearer the bickering brook. It was about a half hour after entering the ravine that Cal Roundtree called softly over his shoulder:

"We've run 'em down, pardner. There's a log cabin up there at the head of the cañon where an old prospector used to hang out; nobody's been in it for three-four year, but there's a light there now."

"Strikes me," said Cody, "that we've got 'em where we want them, where they can't run out on us."

"It strikes me, Cody," said Roundtree, taking his time to think things out to some sort of logical conclusion, "that it would be fair play if we played a dirty trick on them. We leave our horses before we get too close, and creep up on 'em Injun style. And we try our damndest to hear what they are talking about. We might learn something we're hankering to know."

"That sort of doings don't smell very sweet when you hear folks tell about it," said Cody. "But things don't smell very sweet, either, around the tracks Rance Waldron is making."

"You've spoke it the way I was thinking it," Cal said. "Let's go on, *compañero*."

They rode slowly, keeping their horses in the deep grass at the sides of the trail so that all hoofbeats were muffled. Thus they drew within a hundred yards of the log cabin. There Roundtree gave a signal to stop, and both dismounted. They led their horses a score of paces into the thick timber fringing the creek, and removed their spurs to hang them on their saddle-horns. Then walking in silence,

lifting their booted feet as does a cat in wet grass, they drew near the cabin, until they could put out their hands and touch the rough log walls.

Right away they heard voices, but so thick were the logs of the walls, so thoroughly were the interstices chinked with clay, that only a mumble came to their ears. So they moved cautiously, stepping around a corner, trying to do better at another wall. And so they came to a place where the clay, dried out, had fallen, and had left a long slit fully a quarter of an inch wide, between two logs, breast-high.

A voice, not Rance Waldron's, was speaking, and it was querulous and came near being threatening.

"And so there you let me rot all day, damn you! I might of died! I might die yet for all the doctoring I'm getting. By God, Rance, I've got a notion and a damn' good notion—"

"You'd better keep your mouth shut, Tom, old man, before you talk yourself into more trouble than you can ever crawl out of."

There spoke Waldron, and his voice was arrogant, contemptuous, revealing a man very sure of himself and of his own security, commanding and threatening.

But the man Tom spoke up angrily:

"Get it into your head, Rance, that things have changed like all hell! You had me down good and plenty, didn't you? You could have wagged your finger and sent me to the pen, couldn't you?" He laughed chucklingly. "Not any more, kid!"

"You're crazy," said Rance angrily. "What I could have done for you any time during the last two years I could do tomorrow—tonight, as far as that goes! You're too badly shot up to make much time, Gough. Think that over."

AGAIN Tom Gough indulged in his chuckling laugh.

"I've thought it over from all angles, Rance. You won't do any squealing on me, because at the end you've let your foot slip; you'd be squealing on yourself the same as on me. What I've did, you paid me for. The other job, with me getting shot up, you and me did together. *And I can prove it!*"

"Damn you—"

There was a breathless stillness there in the cabin. Then Tom Gough spoke again.

"Try it if you want to," he said surlily. "If you think you're quicker on the trig-

ger than me, and a straighter shot, try it now. If you got away with it, it might be your best bet. Try it, you damn' yellow dog!"

Again there was that breathless silence. Then Waldron spoke again, and there was a marked change in his tone. All the challenge and threat, all the masterfulness and contempt had gone out of it. He said quietly, sounding thoughtful and quite unemotional:

"You are right, Tom. We have gone into this thing together, and we had better see it through together. And I'll even grant you that I no longer have any hold on you; if you are big enough fool for it, you can leave me flat and go your own way for the rest of your life knowing that you don't have to be afraid of me any longer—because as you say, I am as deep in this last affair as you are. It's your turn to speak up: Stick along with me and take orders from me and make yourself a big stake if I get away with this job, as I'm damn' sure I will, with you or without you. Or tuck your tail between your legs and run out on me."

THAT sort of talk, straight from the shoulder, evidently threw Gough off his balance. To the listeners outside the cabin the silence after Rance Waldron's speech, made it clear that Waldron's was the driving spirit and that Tom Gough was the weaker of the two. That conviction became a certainty when Gough answered:

"I'm with you, Rance," he said, and all the belligerent menace had melted out of his tone. "In a way you've treated me pretty fair. From now I know I can trust you or you'd tell me to get the hell out of here while the going is good. Now what?"

"You hole up here for a few days and give that wound a chance to heal. Nobody is apt to drop in on you; if they do, you can say that you were prospecting up in the mountains and got a fall, and are resting up; they can't possibly connect you with the hold-up. I'll manage to bring you some more grub; what you've got with you now will get you through until tomorrow night. Meantime I'll plan; I'll learn a few things I'm not sure of yet; I'll drop in on you late tomorrow night."

"That's fair enough," agreed Tom Gough. "Be sure you bring me plenty coffee and sugar; I like a lot of sugar in my coffee. And plenty of good grub! Thanks, Waldron."



"All right," said Waldron. "I'll be on my way now. Keep under cover; watch out for any smoke from the fireplace; look for me sometime tomorrow night."

"Good night, Waldron," said Gough.

Cal Roundtree had shoved Cody out of his way and was peering in through the open slit between the two logs. He saw Waldron clearly in the candlelight, saw him go to the door and pass through and close the door behind him. And clearly he saw Tom Gough, a man of low, squat stature with a thick thatch of black hair and a week's black bristly growth of whiskers—with a brutish, flat face and a pair of brilliant, close-set black eyes. Roundtree took particular stock of Gough's hat. It was, Cal was certain, brand-new. Old clothes, ragged boots—and a brand-new hat!

Waldron went to his horse tethered near by, then down the trail, returning along the way he had come. Cody and Roundtree stepped softly to the corner of the cabin and watched until the night swallowed Waldron up, and the sound of his horse's hoofs died away.

Then they went to their own horses.

"That man in there, that Tom Gough," said Cal, "is the man that shot old Early Bill. He was made to do it by Rance Waldron. That's something I'm pretty certain of. And the two of them are the stage-robbers; that's something else I'd bet my boots on."

"How come you cinch the shooting of Early Bill on Tom Gough?" asked Cody.

"You don't see a man wearing a new hat every day, Cody. Early Bill, before he checked in his chips, told Doc Joe and the Judge how he had whanged away at the *hombre* that potted him; how he had shot the feller's hat off. He said: 'Watch out for a man with a hat with a hole in it, or a man without any hat at all, or a man with a brand-new hat.' Now we hear Waldron and Tom Gough talk how they're flat busted, and just the same Tom Gough had to spend a few bucks for his sombrero. That's sort of clear, aint it?"

CODY was shoving his foot into the stirrup, but brought it back to the ground.

"It's dead sure you're right all along the line, Cal. We step in right now and rope this Tom Gough. We take him with us back to the ranch and put our rope on Waldron. Then we herd the two of them into Bald Eagle. They've got a jail-house there, I reckon."

"When I was a kid like you," retorted Cal, "I used to go off half-cocked too. I made me some mistakes. We're making us a guess that I'd bet on, but we aint dead sure. If we was, we wouldn't drag these men into jail; we'd string up by their necks. Taking 'em to jail wouldn't do any good; they'd get a jury trial, and they'd go free because we wouldn't have any way on earth to prove anything. Let's leave 'em be for a spell; we know where they are; even if Gough goes on a ways, it won't be far, and we can round him up when we want him. This way, we'll find out for sure, and when we've got 'em where we want 'em, we'll do one of two things: hand 'em over to the law, or burn 'em down ourselves. Now climb on your pony and let's travel. And in case you disremember, you got a bullet along your ribs today, and you might as well put it back to bed."

WHILE Roundtree and Cody were giving their attention to Waldron and Gough, Aunt Jenifer was busying herself in her own fashion. She scurried post-haste to her own room, closed the door and was going to lock it when she discovered there was no key in the lock. She hurried to Ann's room adjoining, carrying a lamp turned low; Ann was asleep, and was smiling. Aunt Jenifer went on tiptoe to Ann's other door; no key there either. Well, of course old Early Bill wouldn't lock doors; and the keys, if ever there had been any, had been lost.

"But," she thought, "that Waldron man's door is locked! He's got a key. There ought to be others somewhere." So, carrying her lamp, turned up higher now, she went prowling through the house, key-hunting. She came to a closed closet and opened it to peer inside, and, of all places, found a key in the lock within the closet. Hmph! Funny place for a key; wonder if it would fit her door?

She tried it in her own lock; it fitted and shot the bolt. She locked herself in and went to Ann's door, the farther one opening upon the corridor. It fitted there too. Seemed as though all the locks in the house were the same. If it worked on these locks, why not on Rance Waldron's?

She scurried with her lamp turned low again to that door through which Waldron had passed several times, always locking it behind him. And the key fitted the lock, and the door opened!

"Keep your dander up, old girl," she admonished herself. "You didn't use to be anybody's scaredy-cat."

She entered a bedroom that was in considerable disorder. She glanced at the bed itself with its covers dragging on the floor; then around the room until her eyes came to a full stop at a table on which there were some papers and a couple of penciled account-books. She flipped over pages: cattle bought and sold; numbers in the various herds, cost and sales prices; that sort of thing, for the most part. Other entries of which she could make little, in her hurry. But among the scattered papers, and a few letters which Early Bill hadn't bothered to destroy, was one new letter signed by Jenkins. She read it almost at a glance:

*Dear Bill: I done my job all right, better than you spekalated. What I mean is I got the whole ten thousand and am bringing it with me only I am staying a day with my relations and will ketch the stage next day.*

*Yours truly,  
Jenkins.*

"So that's it," Aunt Jenifer mumbled to herself. "That Waldron found this letter and got busy, him and the man he's been hiding in here all day. No wonder he wanted to get rid of us! He's a villain and a fool; anybody but a fool would have burnt this letter, or hid it."

Then she fell to pondering; what was she to do with it now? And there remained the adjoining room, its door wide open, to investigate.

She made up her mind in a jiffy. She crumpled the telltale letter in her hand, hurried into the other room and tried the door leading to the outside; again the key fitted. What a silly idea to have a lot of locks all the same! Another tumbled bed; the usual furnishings; the shade drawn as in the first room, which she had decided was Waldron's—and something else. There was a splotch on the floor; a rug had evidently been drawn to cover it, then its edge turned over by a careless foot as the two men departed. And that spot looked to Aunt Jenifer like a blood-smear.

OF the next step she was already decided: She would unlock the outside door, leave it unlocked, but closed, make her retreat through Waldron's room, slip out of his door that led into the corridor, lock that door and carry his key off with her. Then when he came

home and found his outer door unlocked, he would have something to think about; when he missed the Jenkins letter, he'd have still more matter for thought. But there wouldn't be the vaguest hint to make him think that this had been an inside job.

Now she wanted to hurry faster than ever, for she kept telling herself that she was in a den of murderers. Yet she kept telling herself also that now was her one and only chance to make a thorough search of these two rooms.

SHE had heard the old expression about the marrow turning cold in one's bones, and now knew exactly what it meant. Her nerves were on edge, her heart was thumping and her whole body shivering. But she rummaged Rance's room thoroughly if swiftly. There was a coat hanging on a peg; the pockets offered nothing of any consequence: a little loose tobacco, some matches, the stub of a lead pencil, a soiled handkerchief. She opened and examined every drawer in the room; for the most part they were empty. There was a suit of underwear, fairly clean, one pair of socks, not new, a flashy checked shirt, a couple of bags of tobacco with papers, and that was all.

Aunt Jenifer nodded her head.

"Dead broke, he is," she told herself. "Dead broke and bad in debt, I'd bet a man, and ready for anything from highway robbery to outright murder, just to line his pockets. I'm mighty glad Bill Cole Cody is staying here; I wish he was here right now!"

There remained the other room to be searched again, more carefully. She returned to it, trying not to throw too much lamplight on the windows even though the curtains were drawn, and poked into corners, into the one closet, into drawers, as she had done in Waldron's bedroom. Here after a pretty thorough search she found nothing of any interest—until she bethought herself to hunt through the bedding. There were no sheets, but there was a grayish-white blanket, and she was dead sure that the spot on it was a blood-spot. Well, she had done all she could now, and had better scamper for her own quarters.

She unlocked the outer door, removed the key and turned to retrace her steps through Rance Waldron's room. And then she stiffened and almost dropped her lamp; distinctly she heard rapidly oncoming footsteps outside.



For one stricken instant Aunt Jenifer felt as though she were paralyzed. The next second she leaped and ran like a frightened deer; her own racing footsteps sounded extraordinarily loud in her ears as she dashed for Waldron's room and an exit into the corridor. Then an even louder sound struck her ears, a man running outside faster than she could run, making for the outside door of the other room. She gained the door she was heading for and heard the other door snapped open, and heard a man's heavy boots come pounding on. She fled faster than ever, carrying her lamp in one hand, her letter in the other. The lamp chimney was shaken off and crashed to the floor making a noise, it seemed to her, loud enough to wake the dead; but the flame, giving out more smoke than light, still burned on and showed her dimly the way she must go to gain her own room. She glanced back and saw the man coming after her; it was too dark back there for her to make him out clearly, but she knew it must be Waldron, and she could imagine his hard hands choking her to death.

BY about three yards she won the race. But by the time she could get her key into the lock, he was at her door. By the fraction of a second she shot the bolt before his hand touched the knob.

Then she sped through Ann Lee's room and to the door that gave upon the corridor, and as she heard him coming there too, she got that door locked.

There was a heavy silence, then Ann Lee's sleepy voice asking: "Is that you, Auntie? What are you doing?"

Then Rance Waldron's voice spoke up, saying curtly yet not over-loud:

"Miss Edwards, I think you had better let me come in. Or if you like, you might step out here and give me a word of explanation."

"Not tonight, Mr. Waldron, thank you," said Aunt Jenifer with creditable calmness.

Ann Lee sat up in bed, her hair in disorder about her piquant face, her eyes growing enormous as some part of her aunt's dread seeped into her.

"What is it?" she whispered.

Aunt Jenifer put her finger on her lips and shook her head for silence.

Again Waldron spoke, more sternly.

"Miss Edwards, I won't stand for this sort of thing. You come out here and give me a damned good explanation, or I'll smash your door down and come in."

Aunt Jenifer told her pat little lie then.

"I still have Cal Roundtree's gun, Mr. Waldron," she said quietly. "Stick your head in here, and I'll shoot it off."

"I'll bust your door down, I tell you," said Waldron. "I know you haven't any gun. Cody pitched it out into the patio and I saw Roundtree pick it up and carry it off with him. Going to open up?"

"No. Not on your life! And if you try it, I'll yell my head off. I've got a voice that'll call hogs home a mile; and the Cole Cody you mention will be here like a shot, and will work on you the way he did this morning."

"That's something to think about," said Waldron. Then he fell silent. A moment later she could hear his footsteps moving away.

By now Ann Lee was thoroughly frightened. She was sitting up, the bed-covers clutched up to her throat.

"Tell me!" she insisted. "What is it all about, Aunt Jenny? What in the world has happened? What have you done?"

"Sh-h-h! I'll tell you later. I've been poking about in his room, and he caught me. And when I said I'd call to Cole Cody— Well, Cole isn't in the house, I'm pretty sure. Maybe Waldron is bluffed out—but if he comes back we mustn't let him in. He—my God, pet, I believe he'd kill us both! Now don't go to shrieking or fainting, either! You just keep a hold on yourself, and if there's a rumpus, the two of us have got to handle it!"

For a moment the girl sat there in bed shivering, her eyes widening with terror. Then she sprang out of bed, shed her nightgown and swiftly donned a little suit she had brought along with her, a neat, rather boyish riding-outfit. She began looking around for something to use as a weapon, some sort of club.

"He won't come back; I'm sure of it," said Aunt Jenifer. Yet she wasn't sure—and he did come back.

THAT was after he had pondered a moment, after he had returned to his room and Tom Gough's. He saw signs of the invasion; he marked the rug turned back showing the stain on the floor-boards; he even saw the telltale spot on the blanket. In his own room, his papers had been tampered with, and the letter from Bucktooth Jenkins to old Early Bill was gone.

No man, even fool enough to have left that letter, as he had, would be fool enough not to realize what its seizure implied. For a time he was at his wit's end; there was the off chance that Cole Cody might have ridden into Bald Eagle during the evening, anxious and impatient about the will, seeking the Judge's counsel. At least it could do no harm to discover whether Cody were in or out.

He went swiftly yet on tiptoe to Cody's room. He rapped gently, saying: "Cody, are you there? I've got a bad cramp; have you got a shot of whisky with you?"

He waited for an answer and got none; he tried the door. It was unlocked, and he went in, striking a match as he crossed the threshold. There was no one in the room! No Cody to come running if Aunt Jenifer yelled her head off. And no likelihood of Cody returning, this time of night.

SO Waldron returned promptly to Ann Lee's room. There was grim determination in his voice as he said:

"I am going to shoot the lock off your door—or I'll go get an ax. You had better open up. As for calling that Cody, it's no use. I've been to his room and he's not there. The chances are he's no nearer than Bald Eagle."

Ann Lee whispered to her aunt: "That isn't true!" But Aunt Jenifer nodded and drew down the corners of her mouth.

"Only it is true. I knew he had gone out, and I knew he hadn't come back. It's likely he's down at the men's quarters by now, chinning with Cal Roundtree. But if we yelled our heads off, they wouldn't hear; that's why Cal left you a gun this morning, to signal him with. Darn it, I wish we had that gun now! Well, anyhow, I've got all the keys I know about in this place, and it'll take a lot of work to batter one of these doors down."

"Well, what's the answer?" demanded Waldron. "I can't give you all night, you know, to make up your minds."

Ann Lee put her lips close to Aunt Jenifer's ear.

"There are windows!" she whispered eagerly. "We can slip through while he's battering at our door, and scoot like anything down to where Cal Roundtree is!"

Aunt Jenifer whispered back:

"Go take a good look at the windows, goosey. This is a regular old Spanish house; every one of these windows has iron bars like a jail."

"I'll give you two minutes more to think it over," said Waldron. "That's because if I go shooting your lock off, I'm apt to wake Roundtree. I'll go to the kitchen and get a hand-ax; there's one by the wood-box. I can handle that so he won't hear a sound. You've got until I get back to do your thinking. And I'll manage to keep an eye on your door so you don't sneak out on me."

They listened for his departing footsteps and didn't hear a sound. So they quite naturally decided that he was still standing before their door, trying to trick them into sticking their noses out, when he'd be ready to pounce on them. But he had tricked them in another way: he had removed his boots, set them down gently and hurried in his sock-clad feet to the kitchen, got the hand-ax and returned. The next thing they heard was his voice, angry and mocking.

"Fooled you that time, pretty ladies," he jeered at them. "You had your chance to run, but it's gone now. Listen to this."

The hand-ax crashed into the solid oak of the door.

"Open up now, and all I'll do is make you give me back something you stole from my room. Get pig-headed about it, and I won't let you off so easy. Nobody is going to raid my room and get away with it."

The ax crashed into the wood the second time.

"What's the answer?" he demanded.

A VOICE, cool and impersonal, spoke out of the darkness—for it was dark where Waldron stood; he had left his lamp in his room, making his way by striking an occasional match. The voice was that of Cole Cody; the words were:

"What's going on here?"

The answer came quickly enough; a thoroughly frightened Ann Lee forgot entirely for the moment her hatred of a man who had kissed her in violence, to punish her, and had spanked her in anger; she screamed to him at the top of her voice:

"Oh, Cole! God sent you to us. Rance Waldron is trying to break our door down!"

"I can't see you, Waldron," said Cody, his tone as steady and deliberate as before. "From your ax-work I can guess pretty close where you are, though. Want to shoot it out in the dark? Or stick your tail between your legs and get the hell out of here?"



Rance Waldron took his time in deciding how to answer.

"Shooting it out in the dark, Cody," he said after due thought, "is sheer luck. I haven't been over-lucky of late; if it's the same with you, I'd rather take you on by daylight."

"Suits me fine," said Cody. "There's a light in your room, and the door is open. Suppose you step along in there and tuck yourself into bed for the night? Tomorrow is another day, you know."

"And have you pot me in the back as soon as I step into the light? Are you a damn' fool, or do you think I am?"

"I'm no liar, Waldron. You're free to go to your room and shut the door, and I won't pull a trigger. Take my word for it, or try your luck in the dark."

"Your word? You swear you won't shoot?"

"I won't shoot. Now make it lively."

WALDRON dropped his ax. His gun was in his hand as he said, "All right; I'm taking your word for it," and started back down the corridor to his room. Cody, within his own room, a few feet back from the threshold, was in the dark; Waldron, going to his own quarters, was for a fleeting instant dimly outlined. He stepped into his own room and slammed the door.

Then Cody ran along through the darkness toward the rooms where Ann Lee and her aunt were imprisoned. Arrived at his destination, he said:

"Will you ladies open up to me? I'd like to have a word with you."

It was Ann Lee's swift hand that unlocked the door; Cody, his gun still in his hand, since he trusted Rance Waldron in nothing, made no move to cross the threshold.

"Do you care to tell me what the ruckus was all about?" he asked. "It might be a good idea." Speaking pointedly to Jenifer, he added: "You were right in what you told me awhile ago. Roundtree and I have found out a thing or two."

"Will you step in, Mr. Cody?" asked Aunt Jenifer. "You're right welcome."

"I'd be glad to do so, ma'am," said Cody politely, and stepped briskly into Ann Lee's room, "—being as I wouldn't put it beyond our friend Rance Waldron to take a pot-shot at me out of the dark. Thank you, ma'am."

Aunt Jenifer closed and locked the door and wasted no time giving Cody, with Ann Lee all ears to take it in, her

adventure of the night. She even handed the Jenkins letter to Cody, who read it and then stood there frowning at it.

"I don't know what to do about it all," he said at last. "This letter found in his room, and the fact of his having hid a wounded man in his room all day, comes pretty close to putting a rope on Mr. Waldron. He—"

"A man hid in the house all day!" gasped Ann Lee. "A wounded man? Tell me about it!"

"It's my notion," said Aunt Jenifer tartly, "and I reckon it's Cole Cody's notion too, that Rance Waldron and the man he's been hiding are the two that held the stage up yesterday. Right, Cole?"

Cody nodded. "Right, Aunt Jenifer. And more than that, Cal Roundtree feels certain that Tom Gough—that's the man Waldron has been hiding out—is the man who shot old Early Bill. If all of us are right in our guesses, we'd better watch our step. But if we round these two up and hand them over to the sheriff, what can we actually prove against them?"

Aunt Jenifer said crisply: "Sit down, Mr. Cody. Let's have a bit of a war-talk."

So the three sat down.

"Here it is," said Aunt Jenifer. "While you-all were away I snook into Rance Waldron's room; I found the letter there. Next I pried into the other room, where he had his friend hid all day; I found blood on the floor, blood on a blanket. And I put two and two together, and being real bright at adding, I made about sixteen out of it."

"Cal and I figured the whole thing out about as you do. Cal thought it might be a good idea to hang the two of 'em right away. Maybe he was right. Yet come right down to it, we don't really know a thing about either Rance Waldron or Tom Gough, and—"

"TOM GOUGH!" exclaimed Ann Lee. "Why, I know him! That is, I've seen him and I know who he is!"

"Tom Gough," said Aunt Jenifer, "is a bad egg. He's lived for years down our way, and that's not over fifty miles from what used to be Rance Waldron's hang-out. I've even heard he and Waldron used to be friends once; and that there was a man killed, and folks thought that Tom Gough did the killing, but they couldn't ever prove it. And there are those who say Tom Gough has been doing dirty work for Rance Waldron ever since—because Waldron's got the

dead-wood on him, and so can tell Gough where to head in, or hang. Far as I know, it's all just talk, though."

Cody, suddenly grave, remarked: "Cal and I agree with your hunches all along the line, and it strikes me we're right. But I can't see much to be done on it to-night. Suppose we talk this over with Cal in the morning and maybe send for the Judge and Doc Joe to help give us a steer?"

Ann Lee looked her relief; Aunt Jenifer nodded and said vehemently:

"That's just the thing to do. Of course there's the chance that Rance Waldron may run out on us tonight—"

"That'll make us surer than ever that we're right. And he won't be hard to find in this country." He stood up. "I'm off to pick up on my beauty-sleep. . . . 'Night, Miss Jenifer. 'Night, Miss Lee."

"Mr. Cody," said Aunt Jenifer, "I want you to stay near us tonight. I've had the living daylights scared out of me—I'm scared stiff yet. I'll sleep with Ann Lee, and you take my room. Won't you?"

They passed to their room; he stepped after them to the door, closed it gently and said very quietly: "Thanks, ma'am. And good night, ladies."



### CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**C**ODY was first to awake the next morning. He slipped out of bed, dressed quietly and tiptoed to his door, stepping through it, pocketing the key and going straight to Waldron's room. He didn't stop to rap for entrance, but found the door unlocked, and went in.

Waldron was gone, and obviously did not plan an immediate return, for he had stripped the covers from both beds, his and Tom Gough's, carrying them with him.

Cody lifted his shoulders in a high shrug. The chances were that Waldron had gone to join Tom Gough at the abandoned cabin where they had been last night, and could be found when and if wanted.

Well, the first thing was breakfast—or was it a word with Cal Roundtree? Breakfast, of course; talk could always wait. But he hadn't got beyond the stage

of bacon-slicing when Jenifer Edwards, spick and span in a fresh blue dress, came to join him. She gave him a smile that had warmed many a heart in her day along with her "Good morning, Cole Cody!" and then added: "Men are good for some things, the Lord knows what mostly, although of course they come in handy at rescuing yelping dames in distress, but I'll be darned if I'll have any man tinkering with my stove. Scat, until breakfast is ready."

He startled Aunt Jenifer considerably by putting both arms around her slim little body, and giving her a hearty squeeze. Then he departed laughing, to bring more wood.

Breakfast was ready, piping hot and fragrant with the aroma of coffee when little Ann Lee put in her appearance. She too was tricked out in a fresh little frock of baby-blue with filmy white lace here and there, and her cheeks were as pink as a pink morning, and she couldn't help smiling even though a thoroughly detested Bill Cole Cody was right there in plain sight. She said: "Good morning, Aunt Jenny," and, "Good morning, Mr. Cody."

"Good morning, ma'am," returned Mr. Cody solemnly, motivated by the inspiration that calling her "ma'am" would annoy her. And it did.

They sat down at the kitchen table with its bright red oilcloth, and Aunt Jenifer remarked:

"I miss our other boarder, Mr. Waldron. What news of him, Mr. Cody?"

"Gone," said Cole Cody. "And he took along with him all the bedding of his bed and Tom Gough's. And I wouldn't put it beyond him to have carted off a barley-sack full of such things as beans and bacon, and all that sort of thing, which properly belongs to me, being ranch grub."

"I'm not surprised that he's gone," said Aunt Jenifer. "But I'll be mighty surprised if he doesn't show up again. He is dead set on getting this ranch and all that goes with it, and that'll be a pile of cash money, I've a notion." She looked shrewdly first at her aloof niece, then at an inscrutable Cole Cody. "What with two wills giving everything to two silly geese, so that the wills cut each other's throats, seems as though our Mr. Rance Waldron stands a first-rate show of raking in the pot." Then she asked quickly, before either the girl or Cody could answer, "By the way, where do you two keep those precious no-count wills?"



Ann Lee looked straight into Cody's eyes when she replied to the question.

"I've hidden mine in a safe place, not taking any chances on having it stolen."

Cody returned Ann's penetrating look equably and addressed the questioner.

"I'm going to get mine into the Judge's hands and in the bank *pronto*. Around here, it might get lost!"

"You—" Ann began, furious.

"Take it easy, kitten," admonished Aunt Jenifer mildly. "You started it, you know—and there's a lot of things you started that got finished by somebody else."

Cody grinned and looked happy; Ann grew exclusively interested in her plate. As breakfast ended, silent from this point on save for the exchange of a few casual remarks between Jenifer Edwards and Cody, the latter said, rising:

"Thanks for the breakfast, ma'am; it sure was good. Now I'm stepping down for a word with Cal Roundtree."

Cody brought Roundtree up to the house, and the four of them discussed the situation. Cal scratched his head, saying a shade ashamedly:

"I was wrong and you was right last night, Cody. We'd ought to have hung the two of them right then and there. By the way, that friend of yours, Porfirio, is like a bloodhound; he believes that old cattle-thief Early Bill Cole—"

"Mr. Roundtree!" exclaimed Ann Lee. "Don't you dare—"

"Now, don't you be silly, pet," put in Aunt Jenifer mildly. "These men all knew Early Bill a heap better than you did, and if they all want to call him a hell-snapper on wheels, let 'em alone. What's the rest of it, Cal?"

"That Porfirio," Cal said, "has got his teeth into the idea that it's quite a job for a man to make a hat just disappear; he says a hat's hard to burn in a great big hurry; you can throw it away, into a patch of brush, but if a man's got eyes like Porfirio says his eyes are when he's praying in his heart to avenge a friend, he can see every boot-track—or a black hat hidden in the bushes. And he says if you dig a hole and bury a hat, eyes like Porfirio's are going to notice something. Porfirio says he's going to find that hat or spend the rest of his life hunting it."

LATER on that same forenoon, Doc Joe and the Judge drove out to the ranch in the Judge's top buggy.

The Judge bowed gallantly to Aunt Jenifer, then made Ann Lee a profound

bow. Doc Joe, like the Judge, bowed to the girl and thereafter almost bent double before Aunt Jenifer. Ann Lee looked at them in amazement; Aunt Jenifer positively tittered; both Cody and Cal sniffed the air suspiciously.

"We come to greet you at this early, pearly hour," said the Judge sonorously, "because we have been thinking of you, talking of you, pondering the problem of the two wills drawn up by that old scion of sin, Early Bill Cole. We sat up late last night giving the matter our best thought—"

"In fact, ladies and gents," put in Doc Joe, "our hearts were so much with you, our every thought so much bent upon your welfare, we sat up all night! Didn't we, Judge?"

"Now you look here, you, Judge and Doc," spoke up Cal Roundtree good-humoredly yet firmly, "you two step along with me to the kitchen; we're going to have a cup of good strong, black coffee. Come ahead; we've got all day to talk in."

THEY weren't drunk, the Judge and Doc Joe, not they! But during the night of drinking many a toast to their departed friend Early Bill, spending Early Bill's money the way they knew in their tough old hearts he'd want it spent, they had achieved a condition which may be described as a genial glow.

"Do you know," spoke up Aunt Jenifer, beginning to sparkle, "I believe I'd like another cup myself! Kitten, if you'll set the table in the dining-room—"

"Yes, Aunt Jenny," assented Ann Lee quickly, and the two departed.

The Judge and Doc Joe, having spoken a few words together about being sorry to put the ladies to so much trouble, turned to Cole Cody and Cal. In a lowered voice the Judge spoke.

"Gents," he said solemnly, "yesterday we won a couple of bets from the dead-and-gone old reprobate that folks called Early Bill—called him that, I may say at last, because he always got up before daylight, that hour suiting him best of all for his trade of horse-stealing. We had a drink or two to the aforementioned hell hound. We have done more; we have, outside in my top buggy, a full jug. It is my suggestion that, while those two lovely ladies are preparing coffee, we step out to where the jug is."

"It's a great little idea, Judge," said Cole, and one would have thought that he meant it. "First, though, we want to

tell you something and ask your advice. Rance Waldron sneaked out last night—"

"The hell with Waldron and all like him! The thing is—"

"And," said Cody sharply, "last night he took a hand-ax and tried to break down the door to the rooms where the ladies had locked themselves in."

After that there was no further mention of the jug in the buggy. The two old porch-sitters had to be told in detail all that had happened.

Then Aunt Jenifer's voice called from the dining-room:

"Come and get it!"

They all had coffee together, and then they adjourned to the old green chairs of the patio, where it was warm and fragrant with roses, where honeysuckle trailed from one arbor and a Mission grapevine from another, and where humming-birds thrummed.

"It's so lovely here!" Ann Lee said in a small, hushed voice after a deep breath. "I think it's the loveliest place in all the world."

Cal Roundtree, head down while rolling a cigarette, muttered:

"It's going to be hell-and-all if Rance Waldron gobbles it up. How about it, Judge? You ought to know, being a lawyer and a banker too. Old Early Bill had to have himself his fun, alive or dead, I know that; but what I hear about his two wills makes me think they kill each other, and Waldron, being nearest of kin, takes the whole place."

The Judge cleared his throat, but Cole Cody cut in. He extracted one of the two wills, folded twice, from his vest pocket and handed it to the Judge.

"Here, Judge, you take care of mine, will you? You'll know how to handle it. I suggested yesterday that you take care of my interests; suppose you're retained right now to do that for me. Is it a go?"

The Judge accepted the document, unfolded it and smoothed it out and pocketed it.

"You're dead right, son," he said heartily. "I'll take care of it for you. As to the fee, the ten per cent you mentioned is too much, but we'll come to a proper business understanding later."

THE dreamy ecstasy fled from Ann Lee's eyes; she jumped up, ran into the house and returned, bringing her own precious document with her.

"Doc Joe," she said, "won't you keep this for me? And won't you see that I am not cheated out of my rights? You

know that Mr. Early Bill Cole wanted me to have everything that was his, don't you? You will protect me, won't you, Doc Joe?"

Doc Joe fairly snatched the paper into his hands. He spoke to her while he glared at the Judge.

"Miss Ann Lee," he said sternly, "I do know that old Early Bill wanted you to have everything that he has willed to you here. I witnessed his signature; I talked alone with him a spell; he gave you the ranch and a lot of other truck, and by the Jumping Jiminy, you're going to have it!"

This made Aunt Jenifer start laughing.

CODY again mentioned Waldron and Gough; the two older men knew a good deal of Gough, nothing to his benefit, and vowed to get busy learning a lot more of his friendship with Waldron, and what lay behind that power which Waldron held over him.

"There is one other matter which we merely touched on yesterday," said the Judge, "that we might as well nail down right now. No matter which way the cat jumped, you two young folks, Miss Ann Lee and William Cole Cody, have a lot of cash money in the bank, and it's in my bank, and it's deposited there subject to your orders. I'd have to check to find out how big the pile is, but it's right considerable; shucks, just yesterday Bucktooth Jenkins brought in an extra ten thousand bucks to add to it, and Bill Cole Cody and Miss Jenifer's niece can take it any minute they want." He reached into his pocket and drew out a small check-book and tossed it into Cole Cody's hands. Those listening to him, all but Doc Joe, watched and waited for the other check-book. It appeared there wasn't any.

So in the end Doc Joe explained:

"Miss Ann Lee," he said, and sounded apologetic, "this whole set-up is a mess. The money is there in the bank, if the Judge hasn't stole it. Fifty thousand, maybe; maybe a hundred thousand or a lot more. Fact is, I'm no banker and the Judge here claims to be, and for some fool reason, Early Bill trusted him. But here's the joker; the account is in the joint names of you and this here Cody. If either of you wants to draw a cent or a thousand dollars or anything, you both got to sign the same check! That was so ordered by the late Mr. William Cole, known by some as Early Bill. You two have just simply got to get together."



Of course Cole Cody and Ann Lee had to look at each other then, and of course that taunting grin of Cody's came flashing back—and little Ann flushed up and bit her lip. Then she announced calmly:

"I am going to draw out a thousand dollars today! A whole thousand! Oh, Aunt Jenny, think of the things we are going to do!"

No one said anything, not even Cole Cody. Out of the silence Ann spoke again, saying to Doc Joe:

"I can, can't I?"

"Of course you can, my dear girl," Doc Joe assured. "Only, of course you and Mr. Cody will have to sign the checks together, like I just told you."

Ann looked at Cody. He looked back at her, and for once his face was as blank as a slate.

"Mr. Cody, I haven't the slightest doubt," said Ann lightly, "will be wanting some money! So he will sign with me; that's clear enough."

Cody's face remained expressionless.

Doc Joe spoke up then.

"Mr. Cody, sir," he said, "Miss Lee has just asked you a civil question."

"I didn't hear her," said Cody serenely. "I did hear her say something *about* me, but nothing *to* me."

Ann Lee thought that if there had ever been a more infuriating creature— She smiled frigidly.

"I am sorry, Mr. Cody," she said sweetly, "that I failed in the courtesy due you. Will you sign a check with me this morning?"

"Why, now!" exclaimed Cody, and sounded friendly and hearty, "it's an ideal! I could do with a little money myself. **Here;** I'll write the check right now, and **we'll** give it to the Judge to cash and split two ways for us. Where's pen and ink?"

**A**FTER Cody had written and signed the check, he handed it, with the pen, to Ann for her signature below his.

She started to sign, then stiffened, her lips compressed and her eyes blazing. He had written in the amount: "*Twenty Dollars.*"

"I said a thousand!" she said.

"Shucks," said the good-humored Bill Cole Cody. "Twenty bucks is a lot of money. You take ten; I take ten—and there you are."

She crumpled the check and threw it at him.

"When sometime you want to draw out some money, Mr. Cody," she told

him, "say a considerable amount, for some emergency, maybe—why, just come to me for my signature, won't you?"

Right there the conference broke up.



**Y**OUNG as the summer was, it was a lazily languid day by now; the horses had expended their first early morning zest, and the homeward journey of the Judge and Doc Joe lacked the speed and dash of the outbound trip. The two old cronies were drowsy and pleurably sentimental, their eyes heavy-lidded—when in a spot where the narrow road wound down into a cool and shady ravine, both men were rudely startled by a man on horseback who cut unexpectedly into the road in front of them. The man wore a mask improvised from a bandana handkerchief, and his voice was a strange muffled voice—he might have had pebbles in his mouth.

"I want everything in your pockets," he said, "and I want it quick. If you make a fuss about it, I'll kill the two of you inside ten seconds."

Men like the Judge and Doc Joe knew when the cards were stacked against them. They tossed their purses into the dust alongside the road.

"There you are, stranger," grumbled Doc Joe. "Take it and go to hell."

He was about to drive on when he got the rest of his orders.

"I said I wanted everything in your pockets," he was reminded. "Every damn' thing you've got!"

"That's all we got," roared the Judge, his hand itching to reach for his old revolver, but never stirring an inch toward it, for he knew better. "Unless you want our smoking- and chawing-tobacco."

"Get a move on, you two damned old fools! Turn your pockets out."

The Judge looked at Doc Joe; Doc Joe looked at the Judge. There was nothing they could do about it. This free-riding gent had simply beat them to the draw. They emptied their pockets.

They strove to fumble and to hide the papers they had carried, but the steady-eyes bent upon them were too watchful.

"Everything, I tell you! Empty your pockets. Pitch it out and drive on—and get a move on doing it!"

This time they couldn't look at each other. The Judge trod heavily, deliberately, on Doc Joe's toes. And Doc Joe, already stung almost beyond endurance, caught the signal and was glad to have the Judge with him; and like one man, the two of them went for their guns.

WELL along in years they might be, those two cronies of the departed Early Bill Cole. Not as fast on the draw, not as quick on the trigger, not as sure of eye as they had been. Yet there was life in the old dogs yet. It was a sight to see as Arthur Henry Pope and Joseph Daniel Dodge went into action—snatching at their side arms, they threw themselves over the wheels into the road, landing anyhow, sprawling. Doc Joe sat up and began firing at the masked rider; the Judge rested on his knees and loosed his own screaming bullets.

Startled by the crash of gun-fire, their horses bolted, straight toward the man at whose command they had been halted. He too was firing rapidly, yet spacing his shots coolly.

His horse started to lunge, as the frightened team almost ran him down; his bandana slipped; both Judge and Doc Joe saw who it was.

"Waldron!" roared the old Judge and, his skill not being quite what it had been once, shot Waldron's horse through the throat. The beast reared and fell, pawing the air with flailing hoofs; Waldron leaped clear.

A sharp cry of warning burst from Doc Joe.

"Judge! Look out! There's another hid in the bushes."

The runaway team went thundering down the road. The Judge strove to scramble behind a big pine. Rance, on foot now, was firing again, and bullets came whizzing from the man Doc Joe had glimpsed in the brush. But Doc Joe had a good clear view of him, and taking his time, drove two bullets into Gough's body, and yelled in triumph as Gough sagged and fell.

The Judge had but half a dozen paces to go, to get to his big pine, but never made the short distance. Rance shot him through the upper body, and the old fellow sprawled on his face and for a moment lay there, clawing at the dust.

Doc Joe yelled: "Get up, Judge! We got one down!"

But somehow his eyes weren't as clear as they used to be; and there was a tremor in his hand. Rance laughed at

him, fired carefully. And old Doc Joe, his weapon slipping from his suddenly limp grasp, fell crookedly on his side facing the Judge, yet failing to see him or anything else on earth. . . .

Rance Waldron stood stone still where he was, save for the swift, sure movement of his fingers reloading; his eyes were hard and bright and suspicious, bent shrewdly upon the two old men lying one in the dusty road. He saw that there was never a twitch in Doc Joe's body; he marked how feebly the Judge struggled, still unable to turn over. Then for an instant his hard bright eyes flicked toward the brush into which Tom Gough had fallen.

"Tom!" he called. "You all right? Playing possum, or—"

There was a little silence; then Tom Gough's voice, scarcely to be heard, spoke:

"I'm all shot to hell, Rance. Help me, quick; I'll bleed to death."

"You're always getting yourself all shot to hell; you're always bleeding to death," grumbled Rance. "Bleed and be damned to you!"

He stepped along then, not toward Tom Gough but toward the two old men in the road. He came first to Doc Joe, then moved on, muttering, "Deader'n hell."

The Judge, a final spasm of strength swept along on a final spasm of pain, sat up, groped for his fallen gun, found it, and—

Deliberately, not hastening, Rance Waldron shot him square between the eyes.

He turned then, still deliberate, and broke his way through the brush to where Tom Gough lay with his hands pressed against his chest.

"SO you're done for, are you, Tom?" said Waldron. He added quietly, no emotion whatever tinging his tone: "Here, I'll lend you a hand."

Heavy man though Tom Gough was, Waldron lifted him easily and bore him the short distance to the roadside. There he put him down, not more than a score of paces from where the still bodies of the Judge and Doc Joe lay.

"Those two are dead, Tom," said Rance. "Folks'll find them tomorrow. They'll find you, too. They'll say you stuck 'em up, and you three shot it out—and all three of you cut each other down."

"For God's sake, Rance—"



Rance shot him twice through the body. It wouldn't do to have all three men shot through the head!

He emptied the pockets of both the Judge and Doc Joe. He glanced at the two wills and put them into his pocket. He gathered up the rest of their personal effects, money and watches, and dropped the lot close to Tom Gough's outflung hand. Then he went to Gough's horse and rode away into the wooded hills.



IT was a sweet day, mused the young Gaucho Ortega, idling homeward from Bald Eagle in the late afternoon. He felt like singing, and did sing softly under his breath, quite as though it were moonlight, and rode slowly, one foot in its stirrup, a leg about his saddle-horn. So on such a day and in such a mood he came first of all upon the tragedy.

Only three or four miles from town, where a cañon debouched upon the valley, he saw the runaway team, hung up in a roadside growth of brush and small trees, the buggy leaning crazily with one wheel high on a boulder and the pole snapped in two, the horses stopped by a young pine, one on either side, in a tangle of harness. He recognized the horses with a sweeping glance: Doc Joe and the Judge had had a runaway. But where were they?

Nowhere in sight; nowhere in hearing, for he shouted at the top of his voice. He whipped his leg back over the saddle-horn, jammed his boot into the stirrup and gave his mount the spurs. Then, a couple of miles farther on, he came upon the three bodies asprawl in the road or at its edge.

"Holy Mother of God!" gasped Gaucho. He sat staring down at this blood-spattered scene of murder; he crossed himself, his face dead white, the sweat running down his cheeks. "Three men dead! And the old Judge and Doc Joe two of them!"

It was less than half a dozen miles back to Bald Eagle, more than twice that distance to the ranch. And this was a job for the sheriff. Gaucho rode back

toward Bald Eagle like a dark streak, through the afternoon sunshine.

And it was the same Gaucho who brought the heavy tidings to the King Cole Ranch. Aunt Jenifer and Ann Lee were in the patio, and when Gaucho burst upon them they stared back at him, speechless. At first they couldn't make sense of his running words. The Judge and Doc Joe, dead? Dead! When so little a while ago—

And they didn't say a word, didn't ask a question, until Gaucho sped away to find Cal Roundtree and the other men.

Slowly their impassive faces changed and their eyes met. Ann Lee wept softly then, her face hidden in her hands. Aunt Jenifer dashed the tears from her eyes and sat very straight, her head up, her eyes steady with the glint of steel in them. Presently she spoke very gently.

"They were two fine men, Ann darling; they were old; they had to go sometime." Her lips thinned to bleak silence; then she added crisply: "And they killed the murderer who shot them down! That's something."

"I loved them," said Ann faintly. "We were friends; they were friends of old Early Bill! And now—"

She sprang up.

"Is there to be nothing but killing and robbery?" she flared out. "Early Bill the first, then the stage-robbery, with two men nearly killed; now the Judge and Doc Joe! And it's all that Waldron's doings! I know it, I know it!"

"Sh-h! Don't storm at me, Ann. The man they killed wasn't Rance Waldron."

Ann was hushed, but not for long.

"Maybe they are not really dead!" she exclaimed excitedly. "A man can be shot, and yet live!"

And she started running toward the men's quarters, to send a man, to get a doctor.

She came upon a small knot of men, Cole Cody and Cal Roundtree and Porfirio and two others, grouped in a sort of circle, listening to Gaucho's story. She screamed at them before she reached them, to hurry for a doctor.

THE men looked at her gravely, but no one answered her. Cody said, not to her but to Gaucho:

"What was he like, the man who killed them? The other dead man in the road?"

Gaucho screwed up his face. It is a hard thing, making you see a man the way he really looks, drawing pictures

with words. The man hadn't had a shave for a week maybe; he looked like a sick man, but maybe that was because he was dead. He had big hands with lots of black hair on them. Yes, his face was kind of square, and he wasn't a very big man up and down, but wide—

Cody and Roundtree looked at each other and nodded: Tom Gough, for a bet, sent to do the job for Rance Waldron. But why? Cal turned on his heel.

"I'm off to town, boys. I'll take care of things if anything's needed. Come along, Cody?"

Cody shook his head. "Later maybe, Cal; in the buckboard, if I do come, so you better not wait."

Cal went his long-strided way; the small group broke up; Cole Cody and Ann were left standing together.

"It—it's so terrible—" she said, her voice quivering.

"It's hell," said Cody simply.

"Yes, it is hell. And somehow you and I seem to be to blame for it."

"To blame? You and I?" He shook his head, tucking in the corners of his mouth. "Don't let yourself go off on a trail like that, young lady. These things have just been in the cards."

"Why should that man have tried to kill them? They couldn't have been carrying much money."

"Not robbery, no—" he began. And then, for the first time he did think of the two wills, and a new light flashed into his eyes. "Maybe you and I are somehow to blame," he said. "And maybe it was robbery. And maybe two men had a hand in it, and one of them got away!"

"What makes you talk like that? You said it wasn't robbery, and now you say maybe it is—and—"

"It just dawned on me," he said, "that you gave a certain document to Doc Joe to keep for you, and I gave—"

"Rance Waldron!" she gasped, and forgot herself and her pet feud so far as to clutch his arm, tight in both hands.

He studied her for a moment intently. "If you guessed right, you know what this is going to mean, don't you? If Waldron staged this affair, it was because somehow he learned—or maybe just suspected—that the old boys had the wills along with them. And if he got away with them—well, then it's good-by to any hope of ever coming to-own this outfit!"

"Darn the outfit and all that goes with it!" she exclaimed passionately. "I don't care what happens to it now. It's just those two old men—"

"Why, shake!" cried Cole Cody, and shot his hand out; and before she knew it, her hand had sped to a meeting with his, to be clasped tight, held hard.

Hand in hand, there was almost a smile in their eyes, though trouble lay back of it. Slowly their hands fell apart.

"I guess I'll drift along into town too," he said. "I'll take the buckboard and make pretty near the time Cal's making on horseback. But don't you go blaming yourself. I tell you things like this are either in the cards or not, and that's all there is to it."

"And Rance—"

"Right now he's got the game by the tail with a down-hill drag! All he's got to do is set a match to a couple of pieces of paper and sit tight—if he can get away with it! You run along up to the house, you and Aunt Jenifer will be all right; Waldron isn't apt to show up here again in a hurry; besides, I'll have Porfirio stick with you."

He headed toward the corral. She started toward the house, but glanced back over her shoulder. And she saw that he was not going for the buckboard at all. She watched him rope a horse in the corral, lead it into the barn, come out sitting in the saddle. She called sharply:

"You going to town?"

He hesitated, then shook his head.

"I've thought of another place to ride first," he said lightly, and waved at her and rode away.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

**B**ILL COLE CODY rode straight to the lonely, abandoned cabin in the mountain ravine to which he and Cal Roundtree had followed Waldron and Gough. He had no great hope of finding Waldron lingering on there now, but it was as likely a place to pick up the trail.

The shadows were long across the mountain slopes, the pines growing black in the deep dusk in the ravines, and there was no sign of life, no up-drifting smoke from the rock chimney when Cody came within sight of it. Cody called and his voice echoed against the granite cliffs and throbbed away into the returning stillness. He dismounted and



went to the door, his hand on the butt of his gun. The door was ajar; he threw it open and looked the place over. He saw a pile of blankets on the one bunk; other blankets on the floor; some scraps of food on a sagging shelf. That was all.

He went back to his horse, rode out of the ravine and into the golden sunshine again, crossed the creek and struck across country toward town. . . .

Cody dismounted in front of the hotel, tied his horse and looked about for Cal Roundtree. He was conscious of eyes following him and knew that he drew interest here at this hour because he was a stranger; because these men, steadily gathering in numbers, were distrustful of strangers.

Cal Roundtree was turning into a saloon, two friends flanking him, when he saw Cody; he said a word to his companions who went on into the Spread Eagle, and turned back to Cody.

"It was Tom Gough, all right," he said. "The Judge and old Doc fought it out with him like he'd know they would if he knew them at all. All three dead; but here's a sort of funny thing: the shot that killed Gough must have been fired the same split second that he finished off either Doc Joe or the Judge: both the old boys was shot through the head. But there was another man there, if I'm any gauge of tracks."

"I'm sure of it, Cal," said Cody. "It's like the stage hold-up; there were two of them. Tom Gough for one, sure. The other? Rance Waldron—and don't you fool yourself. Early Bill's two wills—the one to Ann Lee and the one to me—they haven't turned up, have they? Not in the Judge's and Doc Joe's pockets, were they? Not in Tom Gough's?"

"I don't know. I don't even get what you're driving at!"

Cody explained swiftly, and Cal began to nod before he had finished.

"Rance Waldron is in town right now," he said, his brows puckering tight as he tried to make heads and tails of things. "He's in a back room at the hotel playing poker. I saw him there awhile ago. Come ahead in and have a drink before you start anything. This wants a bit of thinking. For one thing, Waldron's not hiding; for another, if he did this, he's got nerve and he's sure of himself. You and me'll go slow for a minute, Cody."

Cody nodded, and the two entered the saloon together to range up along the bar with Cal's two friends. They downed

their liquor, the four of them, and stood rolling their cigarettes, grave, thoughtful men. Most of the space in the big barnlike room was given over to games of chance, faro, roulette and the like, with a restricted bare space for dancing. But the tables were deserted; Bald Eagle wasn't thinking of such pastimes to-night.

"We might mosey over to the hotel and see what things look like," suggested Cody.

This time Cal Roundtree nodded. He bethought him of introductions: "Cody, these boys are friends of mine, Red Johnson and Hap Davis from the Broken Arrow." They shook hands. And Cal added: "You boys might come along; it aint far over to the hotel."

THE four men passed into the bar; at its rear was another door, standing perhaps a quarter open. It was a little room in yonder, for gentlemen who wished to play draw or stud; a swinging coal-oil lamp could be seen, and one man's side and shoulders and elbow, and the brim of his hat.

With a look Cody asked of Cal Roundtree, "In there?" and with a look Cal answered, "Yes."

Cody went to the door and pushed it open, Cal and the others keeping three or four paces behind him, and stopping when he stopped.

"Hello, Waldron," said Cody.

Rance Waldron looked up from his game; he was playing with four other men, all strangers to Cody, and none of them particularly fastidious-looking nor handsome—four of the toughest-looking men he had seen in a tough town.

Waldron put down his cards and shoved his chair back; he didn't make a move to rise, and didn't remove his hands from the table top.

"Hello, Cody," he said. "What's wanted? If there's anything wrong with your eyes, I'm playing cards."

"The Judge and Doc Joe were killed today, Waldron," said Cody. "It was an ugly sort of killing, from what I hear. Murder, folks are calling it."

"I heard about it," said Waldron.

"Another man got his come-uppance the same time; a man name of Tom Gough. Maybe you knew him?"

Waldron took his time answering, yet it could not exactly be said that he hesitated.

"Maybe," he said at last.

"Friend of yours?"

"Who wants to know?" Waldron cocked up his brows, and though his eyes had narrowed until they were icy slits, his lips affected a tolerant smile.

"Been in town all day, Waldron?"

Rance laughed. There were two ways to take a thing like this; he had his choice. Rather than recognize the broad implication seriously, he elected to greet it as funny.

"I'd like to get along with the game, Mr. Cody," he said, sounding now like a man whose patience was running out. "No, I haven't been in town all day. I rode in about—" He turned to two of the men at the table with him; a big half-breed, and a lean-visaged, pale-eyed, and furtive-looking youngster. Waldron said: "You boys, what time was it I ran into you at the edge of town?"

"Two o'clock," both said promptly.

Cody heard Cal Roundtree's snort; those two sure had the thing down pat. And Cody was tempted to ask them if they carried watches! Well, there was Waldron's alibi, tight as a rain-barrel. He had been all afternoon, of course, in the company of these fellows—with them in or near Bald Eagle while three men were being killed.

"Now, Cody," said Rance, and chose to laugh again, "I'll thank you to get the hell out of here."

Cody obliged him.

"Nothing to do, nothing you can put your mind to," grumbled Roundtree as the four turned away from the poker room. "Waldron's nobody's fool; he could make him a good living training snakes."

"Kind of too bad all three men, old Doc and the Judge and the other, was plumb shot to death," said Red Johnson.

As they reached the lobby, a sharp, eager voice called:

"You there, Roundtree! Cal! I want a word with you."

The speaker, wiping his mouth as he came out of the bar behind them, was a youngish man in high lop-sided boots, with a bristle of scrubby little black mustache; he was coatless, with his sleeves rolled up.

Cal explained to Cole Cody: "It's Dr. Parke Evans. They sent for him over to Rim Rock as soon as word of a shooting got out." He turned toward the Rim Rock doctor.

"Anything private, Doc?" he asked. "I got friends with me."

"Yes. It's private—and I'm in a hurry."

He led the way, rolling down his sleeves, to the stairway leading upward from the lobby, and Cal climbed along after him. Halfway up the staircase he called down to Cody:

"Stick around, Cody, and wait for me. I won't be long; then we'll ride out to the ranch together."

So Cole Cody waited. He stepped out onto the porch; there were two rocking-chairs there, and he thought that never in all his born days had he seen chairs, or anything else, that looked so empty.

TIME passed; at last he sat down on the step. He ought to be getting along, he thought; Ann Lee and Aunt Jenifer would be alone, and the hour would bear down oppressively upon them. He could leave word for Cal; no sense waiting all night. He stood up, not quite decided, yet on the verge of going. And then Rance Waldron with his two alibi-artists at his heels came out and ran down the steps onto the sidewalk; Waldron flashed a glance at Cody where he stood in the lamplight, and said something in a low voice to his companions; the three laughed.

Cal Roundtree came out. He looked to be in a daze; he walked like a man in his sleep; he looked at Cody and did not see him.

Cody thought: "He's been hit over the head!"

He said: "Cal! What's come over you, man? You haven't gone and got yourself drunk this quick, have you?"

"Hello, Cody," said Cal dully. He stopped and removed his hat and ran his fingers through his hair. "Come ahead, kid," he said. "Let's go get our horses. Let's pile out of here for home."

The two strode along side by side and got their horses. They swung up into their saddles and headed down the road. By starlight nothing could be made of Cal's face, but his heavy silence was disquieting.

"I got to do some thinking," said Cal presently. "And dammit, I can't! I'm all tangled up, like no man ever was before. I got to tell you something, Cody. But I don't know how much to spill and how much to hold back. Because I can't tell it all; I got to hold part back! Shut up a minute, and let me try to think."

Cody leaned out of the saddle and clapped the perplexed man on the shoulder, and made no other answer.

They rode for ten or fifteen minutes, out across the floor of the valley, strik-



ing into the little rolling hills, before Cal spoke again:

"Like I said, Cody, I can't spill the whole sack o' beans, though I wish to God I could! And you better pull leather whilst you listen good, else you're apt to fall out'n your saddle."

And here is what Cal Roundtree held himself free to tell:

Dr. Evans had led the way upstairs to a locked room; he had unlocked the door, motioned Cal Roundtree to go in, and then closed the door and stood outside, guarding against any interruption. On the far side of the room, with his back turned, a man was standing. The lamp was turned low; Cal did not make out at once who it was. But when the door had been closed, the man moved to the table where the lamp was, and turned up the wick.

Here in the flesh, looking very much alive, and in fact as he had looked for the twenty years Cal had known him, save for a terrible grimness on his face, was old Doc Joe. At once Doc Joe lifted a warning hand to forestall any exclamation from the astounded Roundtree.

"No loud talking, Cal," he said incisively.

Cal swallowed. "Me? Me, I can't talk at all! What in hell's this mean?"

DOC JOE pulled up a chair close to the bed and spoke softly, throttling his voice down to a near-whisper.

"For one thing, I aint dead now, never was and don't intend to be for a spell yet," he said. "Don't you go thinking of ghosts."

Cal snorted. "You don't look like what I might suppose a ghost would look," he said curtly. "Now let's get after this: What in the name of blazes you been playing dead for?"

"For a spell, I had to," said Doc Joe. "If I hadn't, Waldron would have killed me sure, like he did the Judge and Tom Gough. He kicked me side of the head." He put his finger gingerly to a bit of taped gauze over his temple. "It sort of dazed me. I lay on my side and saw him step over to the Judge. He shot the Judge before I could wiggle a finger. Then he looked at me. I hope I never have another man look at me like that again, not with me laying in the road and him standing over me with a gun! Maybe I sort of fainted a minute; I don't quite know. I was scared enough. He came back dragging Tom Gough. He shot Gough twice; then he rode away.

I tried to get up. I got dizzy, and sure did faint for good. When I woke up and the boys hauled us into town, I was out cold. They thought I was dead. I let 'em keep on thinking so. Nobody knows but Doc Evans; you and him, now, Cal. And you're both going to keep your mouths shut until I give the word."

Cal came bounding to his feet at that.

"Like hell I am!" he began shouting. But old Doc Joe clapped a hand over his mouth and admonished him: "Shut up, you blasted fool! You're supposed to be in here with a dead man. And you're going to—"

"Waldron is downstairs right now," said Cal, stubborn and eager. "He killed the Judge, you say. And you saw him? Lemme out o' here!"

"Shut up and sit down! Listen: The Judge and me, we had those two fool wills old Bill Cole drew up. And Waldron's got 'em now. You can bet your last bottom dollar he's got 'em hid, hid good and proper—"

"You're crazy, Doc! Waldron, once he got his hand on those papers, wouldn't have wasted two minutes doing away with 'em. He'd have ducked over the first hill and burned 'em. Don't you realize that that's all he's got to do to—to—to—"

Then Cal came to a dead halt and his face began to redden and he looked downright foolish. So foolish, in fact that Doc Joe stared at him wonderingly.

CAL ROUNDTREE, telling this to Cole Cody as the two jogged along, came again to a halt. Then he began to swear explosively.

"Cody, there's something I know that I got to keep under my hat. I almost let the cat jump with old Doc Joe; I'm damn' near doing the same thing with you."

"Why not, Cal?" said Cody quietly. "You and I haven't known each other all summer, but— What's on your mind?"

"No," Cal growled. "Let me go on now and tell you the rest; what old Doc Joe has got in his mind. He says Rance Waldron is smart like a fox; he says no, Waldron won't destroy those wills right off; he says Waldron will play safe, and hide 'em good, until he sees for sure which way the wind blows. He claims to be next of kin to Early Bill. But, says Doc Joe, this Waldron will figger maybe other heirs might turn up; they always do when there's a pot of money dangling. And it might take years be-

fore Rance gets his teeth into the property, and by then the lawyers would have anyhow half of it. That's what Doc Joe says, and I guess you got to admit there's a speck of sense left in the old devil.

"What he says, is this: Waldron will try to gobble the King Cole Ranch and anything else left hanging. If he makes a go of it, he'll burn the papers. If there's any slip-up along that trail, well then, with the two wills in his war-bag, he can dicker with you—dicker with the girl. He'd be holding a good hand. Now, if we strung him up, he'd be dead, and the wills would be the same as gone forever. This is Doc Joe's idea, mind you."

Cole Cody thought the matter over from all angles—from all angles, that is, which it was given him to glimpse. There were things he did not know. After a while he asked:

"What does Doc Joe plan? How long is he going to play dead?"

That started Cal Roundtree off again. But he explained some part of Doc Joe's plan.

"Late tonight the other doc, Evans, will find a paper in Doc's room, signed by Doc Joe himself, dated a couple of years ago, saying when he's dead he yearns to be packed up and shipped back to his boyhood's home in dear old Tennessee!" Cal spat far into space. "So Doc Evans will pack him in a box, and haul him off with him tomorrow, going back to Rim Rock, and to the railroad at Christmas Forks. They'll ship some sort of a bundle, and Doc Joe will hide out for a spell with Doc Evans. Later he'll get a chance to creep back thisaway by the dark of the moon. Meantime we're to watch and wait for Waldron to be making his play. Doc Joe says he wants to be in at the hanging-bee; he wants a hand on the rope. . . . Say, let's fog along; I need to sleep on this."



ARRIVED at the ranch, they unsaddled, cared for their horses and said good night, Cal to turn in at the bunk-house, Cole Cody hastening up the slope to the ranch-house. In the starlit patio he came upon Porfirio lounging on a bench, waiting for him.

"That is you, Don Codito?" he asked softly.

"Yes, Porfirio. Everything all right here? No visitors?"

Porfirio assured him that all was well; no, no visitors. And the ladies? Not five minutes ago, or may be ten, they had gone to their room.

"See you in the morning, Porfirio—"

"But wait!" exclaimed Porfirio excitedly. "I have found it, like I said I was going to do. You see it, Don Codito."

"What the devil is it?" muttered Cody, stooping to see better. "Not a dead cat, is it? A hat!"

"*Seguro que sí, señor!* You are damn' right she is a hat! An old one it is, *tambien*, and with a hole of a bullet in it? Better we go inside and have a lamp; you are going to see something. It is the hat of the man that killed Señor Early Bill Cole, and it is the hat of the man I am going to kill!"

Cody led the way into the living-room; while he was lighting a lamp, Porfirio explained how his persistence had brought him to his discovery. From the place where the man had hidden when he shot Early Bill, Porfirio on horseback had ridden a score of times, following each time a slightly different path. And at last his keen eyes had seen a small dead pine limb, sticking out from under a boulder!

Aha! He had it! For how could a stick get itself shoved under a rock like that? If a man had moved that rock now, and had been in a hurry settling it back, and in a hurry to ride on, he might with a careless boot have kicked that stick where it got caught under the stone! Porfirio sweated over the boulder, moving it—and found the hat.

Yes, there was a bullet-hole through it. There was more. In the sweat-band were the initials, tooled through the leather, "T.G."

"Tom Gough, that's who it was, Porfirio," he said as he tossed the hat to the table. "But Waldron— Look, Porfirio, Tom Gough is dead already. He's the stick-up that fought it out with the Judge and Doc Joe."

Porfirio went out, cursing softly.

Cody, not yet of any mind for bed and sleep, started a quick blaze in the fireplace and dragged a big comfortable chair in front of it. Sunk deep into Early Bill's pet chair, rolling a cigarette, he did not hear a door open and close softly. What he heard first was a subdued voice saying:



"Hello, Cole Cody. Mind if I join you at the fire a minute? I can't sleep—can you?"

He rose and drew up a companion chair; the young firelight, catching at a stick of pitch-pine, flared up and shone brightly on his face and little Ann Lee's as they stood a moment looking seriously at each other; it shone in their eyes and made them bright.

HE thought resentfully: "That confounded Doc Joe—I could kick him! Here she's been crying her eyes out for him and the old Judge, slaughtered; and there in Bald Eagle is Doc Joe no doubt getting drunk!" After a while he said: "Ann Lee, you realize by this time, that there's not a chance in the world of either you or me ever coming to own any part of the King Cole Ranch?"

"Yes. Maybe it's, queer, but I don't seem to care any more. After what has just happened—those two dear old men—"

(Darn your hide, Doc Joe! It was hard for Bill Cole Cody to keep from violating Cal's confidence, just as it had been for Cal to keep from blurting out something else he knew, something he felt bound to keep to himself.)

They fell to talking briefly and sketchily about each other, about themselves. He knew so little of her: she had taught a country school; she had her Aunt Jenifer to live with; her parents were long dead; her father had been one of Early Bill's closest friends. She knew so very little of him; a young man who lived alone, who had his ambitions, who had been rancher and miner, he too had had a father who was a lifetime friend of Early Bill.

They laughed a little together, and came closer each other than ever before, when they started to speak at the same instant and with the same thought:

"Why, your father and mine, too, must have been great friends!"

Cody made himself another cigarette, and instead of smoking it or even remembering that he had made it to smoke, sat rolling it with his lean, strong fingers. He said without looking up:

"I could almost be glad—in a way, I would be glad if it wasn't that Waldron might come to profit by it—that those two wills are, anyhow for the present and maybe for good, out of the picture." Then he did straighten and look at her, and she saw his eyes, keen and steady, bent upon hers. And then he laughed again. "All we've done, maybe all we'd

ever do, was fight like cat and dog over the darned place! Maybe now—well, maybe we can get along without fighting! It might be fun for a change, Ann Lee?"

"I'm a beast most of the time, I'm afraid," she said contritely. "And I try so hard not to be! Honestly, Bill Cole Cody, I try terribly hard. And—and I really didn't go to shoot you!" Her eyes dilated; she leaned close and clutched his arm tightly. "You'll believe that, won't you? Please do! That—that darn' gun of Cal Roundtree's—"

He put his hand on hers. He said soberly: "You're being mighty sweet, Ann Lee. I never knew a girl like you!"

She stirred slightly and sighed; she moved her arms, giving herself a little hug; she said; "Dear old Early Bill, he did try, didn't he? Tried so hard to 'have him his fun' and at the same time to do something splendid for you and me. Well, when I go back to teaching—"

"Ann! You haven't forgotten, have you, the money he left for us in the bank, fifty-fifty? And you talking about teaching!"

Her sudden laughter surprised him.

"Honestly," she exclaimed, "I had forgotten all about that part of it! Why, there are thousands and thousands there, all yours and mine! For us to take and use any minute we like! It's like a fairy tale, isn't it, Cole Cody?"

"What'll we do with all that money?" he asked, glad to keep her in this gayer mood.

She made a face at him.

"I could have killed you! When I said that I was going to take out a big round thousand, all at once, and you cut me down to ten dollars!"

He chuckled. "You asked for it, you know you did, Miss High and Mighty."

IN the far, dim end of the long room Aunt Jenifer cleared her throat considerably.

"Mind if I come in, you two?" she asked, and came straight ahead. "I'm close to getting the jim-jams, all alone in my room. And I got to thinking about a pot of coffee and— You two fighting again?"

Cody gave her his chair, squatted on the corner of the hearth and started a fresh cigarette. Ann Lee began to laugh.

And thus began on the King Cole ranch a short period into which entered many a pleasant moment. . . .

They rode together hours on end, memorizing the lovely details of the vast

King Cole Ranch. Once Ann Lee, as they came to the crest of a rise of land from which they could look for miles across a glory of undulating panorama, exclaimed breathlessly, "Oh, Cole! If this really could be ours!" And he repeated within himself, not looking at her but into the farthest blue distance, his jaw hard and his eyes narrowed: "Ours!"

They had been sitting in the patio one evening, with even fewer words and with longer glances between them than ever before, when three occurrences burst upon them with the effect of sudden, unrelated and unexpected explosions. They sat tonight on the same green bench; the first stars were coming shyly into the sweep of the clean, richly blue sky; Cody put his hand out and very gently touched her fingers.

"Ann," he said. "Ann Lee—"

They had heard no sound of footsteps, so enwrapped were they in the concerns of their own world, when of a sudden Porfirio stood before them.

"Don Codito!" he burst out in some tremendous excitement. "Come quick! For the love of God, señor, come as fast as lightning! No, not the señorita! You are to come alone. You won't believe it—it is a miracle, Don Codito!"

"Are you drunk, Porfirio?" snapped Cody.

Porfirio caught him by the sleeve and fairly heaved him up from his place at the girl's side, and willy-nilly, Cody had to accompany him. Porfirio began whispering in his ear; and then Cody understood and went willingly enough, glad that one sequence of a tragi-comedy was at an end. At the darkest corner of the house where a great live oak almost swept the ground with its lower branches, Porfirio brought him to Doc Joe.



WHEN Cole Cody came rushing back to Ann Lee, he found her standing in the patio, her slight body rigidly held. Porfirio's abrupt appearance had startled her; she was vaguely frightened—and for some reason her heart was pounding.

"Ann! Something wonderful! Listen, Ann—don't let it bowl you over."

"Cole! What is it?" asked Ann Lee.

"Come into the house; quick! And get Aunt Jenifer. There's something I want to tell both of you; it's just about the most wonderful news—you won't be able to believe it. Only hurry, please!"

In the lamp-lighted living-room they found Aunt Jenifer. She said quietly:

"All right, Cole. It's something to surprise us, but we won't be silly about it, especially since it's good news. We can take heaps of that, Ann and I."

When he told them, Aunt Jenifer sat down right in the middle of the floor; Ann reached out and clung tight to him.

Then Doc Joe came in.

JENIFER scrambled to her feet and kissed him. Ann Lee deserted Cole Cody and put both arms about Doc Joe and gave him a mighty hug.

"Oh, Doc Joe! Doc Joe!" she kept saying over and over.

Doc Joe beamed all over. He made them each a bow; he kissed first Jenifer's hand, then Ann Lee's.

"Ladies!" he exclaimed throatily, his face red. "I never thought anything could make a man so happy!"

"Listen!" cut in Cody. "Doc Joe wants us to hide him a little longer—a few minutes or a few hours, I don't know. He knows a lot about Rance Waldron; he'll tell you what it is. And while we didn't know where Waldron had gone, he knew and was having him watched all the time. And he knows that Waldron is on his way right now to the ranch, and ought to be here any minute. So it's up to us to get Doc Joe under cover in a hurry, then be ready for Waldron's coming."

"That's it, my boy, that's it!" said Doc Joe hurriedly. "I don't want any beans spilled until I do the spilling. Get me out of sight, can you, ladies? Where?"

"Into our rooms!" said Aunt Jenifer, and started leading the way. "That's the safest place. Then she said, 'Hush!'" and all stood at attention, straining their ears. Through the silence which shut down about them, all heard distinctly the thud of hoofbeats not far away.

"Hurry along," said Cody. "I'll be in the main room. If it's Waldron, I'll find out what he wants."

"He wants the King Cole Ranch," snapped Doc Joe over his shoulder, as already, between Aunt Jenifer and Ann Lee, he was being steered toward the safe harbor of their rooms.

Yes, Rance Waldron wanted the ranch and meant to have it. He didn't



knock; why should he, coming home, returning to his own place? He shoved the door open and strode in; his thumbs were cocked into his belt; his hat was far back on his thatch of hair; his eyes were bright and arrogant as they met Cody's.

"So you're still here, Cody, are you?" he said curtly. He was wearing riding-gauntlets, new, ornate and expensive ones. His hands looked white and well-cared for, the hands of a gambler whose fingers knew each card in the deck. He drew his gauntlets off, whipped them against his leg, tossed them along with his hat to the big table and sat down in the old comfortable chair before the fireplace. "Still hanging around, eh, Cody?"

Cole Cody's throat constricted. He came close to choking.

"You know," said Waldron, stretching his long legs out, reaching indolently for his tobacco and papers, starting to build himself a cigarette, "you're a damn' fool, Cody, for sticking around in any hope of catching a few drops that might spill out, over the top of the bucket. Because, if you listen to me, there won't be any drops spilled over. It might be a good time if you tucked your tail between your legs and got to hell out of here." He licked his cigarette, slid a match along his thigh, held the small steady flame up before his eyes thoughtfully a moment, lighted his cigarette and drew the first draught of smoke. Then, before he went on, he hooked his thumbs back into his belt, and his hands thus were very close to his guns. "Let's get down to bedrock, Cody," he said, and his voice changed, getting as hard as flint. He stood up, coming lithely to his feet, standing firmly, balanced nicely. "You haven't any claim here. It's common knowledge, told in every saloon, that you had some sort of a trumped-up 'will,' a faked thing—and that you haven't even got that now. So you can get to hell in a hurry, Mr. Cody. Am I right?"

Cody swallowed. He answered very quietly, very slowly:

"Waldron, if I'm taking a big dose of you now, you'll know why later on. Suppose, until that time comes you keep your mouth shut? I'm not asking a hell of a lot—just *shut up!*"

Waldron chose to laugh. "Thought you had an edge on the situation, didn't you? 'Thought you'd gobble the ranch along with that nifty little pink-and-white female thing, Ann Lee, that a man can buy a dozen of in town for—"

Cody struck the way lightning strikes.

Rance Waldron, with his belted thumbs, had his fanwise fingers brushing the grips of his guns. Cody didn't think of guns. He had hands, capable hands, and he used them.

Leaping straight across the floor, he struck with his left hand a blow for any hard-striking man to be proud of. Only Waldron wasn't there. He was a quick leap away, jerking out his guns. And he was in high heaven, with every right of provocation to burn his man down. Attacked without warning!

There was a witness, but he knew that only later. It was Ann Lee, who had stolen on tiptoe from the room in which Doc Joe and Aunt Jenifer were talking two-at-a-time, a tremulous Ann Lee who was wondering where a certain William Cody had betaken himself.

Now as Cody had leaped forward and Waldron had leaped back out of reach, Waldron fired and Cody struck again—and little Ann tried to scream and tried to shut her eyes, and could do neither. In a sort of trance she saw how it was that Bill Cody struck: not with his fist this time, since that would have been too late, but with his whole body, head-first, launching himself like a long lean catapult with bullets ripping the air where he had been a split second before. And as his feet left the floor, he became a sort of giant's arrow in horizontal flight, and his head struck Rance Waldron in the middle, and his hands got their hold on the man he sent toppling and crashing to the floor.

CODY hadn't missed all the bullets. Two had scraped him; there was a scratch along the top of his head, and blood ran down into his left eye; there was a twin scratch six or eight inches long down the back of his left shoulder. Ann Lee saw the blood and thought he was surely dead, and came running; she'd grab Waldron's guns and—

But no intercession was needed. As Waldron spilled back on the floor, one of his guns flew out of his hand; with one dimmed eye, Cody could see that. The other gun swung in its brief arc to blow his brains out, but Cody's hand swung quicker. He caught Waldron's wrist; he all but broke it in the power of his grip; slowly he twisted it so that the muzzle of Waldron's gun was against Waldron's temple. And then Cody spoke his little speech:

"Pull the trigger now, Waldron, if you like. Or drop the gun—quick!"

The gun fell from Waldron's fingers. Little Ann Lee, standing so close to them both now, caught it up, ran for the other, backed off and stood in a corner with both weapons in her hands. The two men stood up. She said:

"Rance Waldron, I am going to kill you. I know I'll never be sorry if I do; I may be sorry all my life if I don't!"

That made Bill Cody laugh.

"No, you don't, Ann Lee!" he called to her, "I don't want Waldron killed right now. I'm not even going to kill him myself—unless, mind you, it's just accidental."

Then his tone hardened and he stepped closer to Waldron.

"You asked for it," he said curtly.

They fought all over the room; they fought until Ann turned deathly sick; they fought until Aunt Jenifer and even Doc Joe, half hidden behind her, looked in through a half-open door.

Once Waldron strove to snatch up the heavy poker; once he snatched up a solid oaken chair. These did him no good; Cody was too lightning-fast for him. Once Waldron fell, going over backwards, and lay there a moment, and Cody stood patiently waiting for him to get up.

"All right," he said. "I quit, Cody."

Cody shook his head. He was thinking of the old Judge, of old Early Bill, even of Tom Gough shot like a dog. He said quietly:

"No, Waldron, you're not licked yet. Stand up."

"Like hell I will!" gasped Waldron.

Cody came closer and drew back his boot, poising it to drive it into the felled man's body.

"Stand up, I say," he commanded. "If you don't I'll bust you open with my boot. Stand up!"

Waldron stood up. He charged like a bull—

Bill Cody struck one more blow. It took Waldron on the point of the chin; it seemed to lift him a foot from the floor. And this time when he fell, he was beyond rising.

Ann Lee thought him dead. So did Aunt Jenifer. So, for that matter, did Doc Joe.

IN the kitchen: "Your poor dear face!" gulped little Ann Lee. "Your poor eye!" And tears began spattering.

Bill Cody caught her in his arms; he forgot the unloveliness of his battered face as he drew her tight and kissed her. And it is of record that Ann Lee returned

his kiss exactly the way it was received, a fact to be sworn to if necessary by Cal Roundtree who, just bursting into the room, stood a moment transfixed on the threshold.

But they heard him and whirled about; Ann Lee turned scarlet and Bill Cody's good eye glowed fiercely.

"Look here, Roundtree—" he began.

Cal grabbed him by an arm, yanked him close, then whispered into his ear.

"I bet Rance Waldron's here, from the looks of you," was what he said. "And Cody—"

"No secrets from Ann Lee," said Cody, pulling away. "Sure he's here. And so is old Doc, and both Ann and Aunt Jenifer know that, too."

Cal emitted a whoop and came close to the execution of a war-dance.

"Keep Waldron from getting away; lead me to old Doc Joe!" he cried.

WALDRON was in a small room with iron-grilled windows, and a murderous-looking Porfirio, a gun in his belt, and a wicked-looking knife in his hand, was riding herd on him. Cody's cuts and bruises had been patched up a bit. Doc Joe and Aunt Jenifer, hearing voices, came into the kitchen.

"Keep all this dark from Waldron until tomorrow," said Cal. "That's all I ask."

"That's fair enough, Cal," nodded old Doc Joe. "Only just what is it that we're to keep dark?"

But at that Cal shook his head. Finally he said:

"Tell you at sunup. Just keep Waldron alive and handy. 'Night, folks."

For a time after Cal's abrupt departure there was a deal of speculation, but since it led nowhere, such talk died away. Presently Bill Cole Cody and Ann Lee found themselves alone in the kitchen.

"I love you so much that it hurts," said Bill Cole Cody. "I love you more than anyone on this earth ever loved anyone else! Twice, ten times as much!"

"Why, Cole Cody! I love you every bit as much as you love me—more! You couldn't love anyone the way I could—the way I do!"

"Couldn't, huh?" demanded Cody. "You look here, Ann Lee Cody—"

"I'm not Ann Lee Cody yet, Mr. William Cole Cody. And if you dare insinuate that I'm one of those colorless little creatures that—"

And so on. . . .

Before sunup all in the house breakfasted, even to a sullen Rance Waldron,



save Doc Joe alone, who as yet wanted Waldron to know nothing about his presence, about his still being above ground. Yet Waldron, battered and angry, had a certain malicious grin in his eye. Over the coffee he said with a dash of his old cocksure arrogance:

"My lawyer's coming out this morning. The sheriff will be with him, or close behind. This place is mine, is going to be proved mine, and every damned one of you is going to clear out, bag and baggage."

Roundtree came up from the bunkhouse. He carried an open envelope in his hand. He cleared his throat, forgot all about saying good morning, and announced a bit of astonishing news:

"I just got a letter last night," said Cal. "It's a letter from a guy by name of Mr. William Cole, known far and wide as Early Bill."

The first to gasp was Waldron:

"You fool! Early Bill's dead and buried! You crazy?"

"Nope, I aint crazy. Yep, he's dead and buried. Just the same he wrote me a letter and I just got it last night." He tossed the missive to the table. "Here, Cody, you read it out loud," he said.

Cody caught it up, whipped the letter out of its envelope and stared at it a long minute. He stared from face to face, then back at the letter.

"Here's what it says," he said slowly, "and it's in Early Bill's handwriting!"

And he read aloud:

*"Dear Cal, you old sinner—me being dead and dug under ground, my old bones sort of feel cramped. I'd sort of like if you'd dig me up, soon as you get this, which I'm writing sitting on top a nice big pink-and-white cloud sort of learning to get the hang of a harp; and I want you to shift me over where I told you. Now get a move on, and me, I'm having me my fun yet.*

*So long, Cal!*

*Wm. Cole, alias Early Bill.'*"

Waldron pretended to laugh. The thing of course was some sort of hoax.

"No, it aint," said Cal soberly. "This letter just come, like I say, into Bald Eagle by stage last night. It was sent in another envelope from a feller I'd heard old Early Bill talk about a time or two, a feller that used to be friends with him. I reckon Bill sent it a roundabout way, to get here when he wanted it to." He cleared his throat again and added: "As

for him squatting on a cloud twanging a harp, it's a lie, and I'd tell him so; more likely he's shoveling coal down hellwards. . . . But never mind; I got Porfirio outside, and Gaucho and a couple shovels, and we start doing what the old fool said do. Come ahead."

Out under the three pines, hushed and wondering and with a touch of awe, at Early Bill's favorite dawn hour men went to work with their shovels. So exclusively were they occupied in what was going forward, that none particularly remembered Rance Waldron, who, sneering after his fashion, hands on his hips, stood a few steps withdrawn—none, that is, except old Doc Joe, who had taken his chance to slip out of the house and follow on, and who now peered from behind the farthest of the three pines.

Little Ann Lee, her face very white, her eyes enormous, clutched Aunt Jenifer's arm tight in both hands, and Aunt Jenifer put a comforting arm around her. The sods flew under the strongly wielded shovels; the soil was light and loose; very swiftly the excavation took form, some seven feet long, half as wide, two or three feet deep—

"I'm going to the house," murmured Ann. "I—I can't stand it!"

Cal Roundtree, down in the excavation, looked up and said sharply: "You stay right where you are!"

And an instant later he exclaimed triumphantly: "Here it is!"

HE reached down, felt in the loose soil with both hands and unearched a small soil-encrusted iron box—exactly like the one which Cody and Ann had opened together with two keys! He tossed it up to them, to Cody and Ann both, and said: "You'll see this one opens with two keys just like the other. You two better open it! Old Early Bill aint here at all; me and Gaucho moved him the night after he was planted here. That box is for you, because that's what he told me, making me swear to keep my trap shut. —Open it!"

With trembling fingers they did get it open. There were folded papers within. The top one said briefly: "*This is my Ace in the Hole. I always figured to hold one in any game like this!*" Then there was a letter addressed to Ann Lee. There was one for William Cole Cody. There was a sealed envelope, addressed to them both together.

Next was a picture, a fine likeness of an old, lean, devil-may-care man with a

## ACE IN THE HOLE

humorous gleam in his eye. And it was inscribed: *"To Ann Lee and Cole Cody from an old friend, Early Bill."*

And Ann came close to shrieking out: "Why, I knew him! Aunt Jenny, look! Don't you remember that old man who came to our house, and he was broke and sick and sad-looking, and we took him in and—"

And Cole Cody, a queer catch in his voice was muttering: "So that's Early Bill! The darned old sinner! I played poker with him; he let me skin him out of his eyeteeth; he stuck around and let me stake him; he even asked to borrow money from me—if I'd have known who he was, I'd have chased him off the ranch!"

They read their letters hastily; Ann was crying softly.

"Open the big envelope," said Cal. "That's Bill's Ace in the Hole."

*"I've had me my fun, I reckon. I thought as how, knowing the two of you pups, you might fight a while, then fall in love and get married; I'd like that fine. But maybe things will go some other way, and maybe that damned sneaky varmint name of Rance Waldron might throw a monkey-wrench in the machine; I've got a hunch he's the one hired somebody to shoot me down, him being too foxy and maybe scared. And now here's my third will, and by gravy, my last: And you'll find it leaves everything I've got to you two kids, fight or don't fight, marry or don't marry. And honest, kids, I did have a good time—I'm still having it, right now. So long."*

And there was the will!

"Grab that Waldron *hombre!*" Doc Joe shouted. "He's going to hang; and me, I'm going to see that he does."

Waldron whirled. His face went as dead white as Ann's had been. He could have had no thought for that first instant save that he was looking on a dead man, one he himself had murdered. Then he was quick to know he had been tricked, and he was quick to snatch out from his belt a gun that no one had seen, that no one knew where he had come by it. He swung it, murder in his eyes, upon Doc Joe.

And Porfirio, watchful as a cat, shot Rance Waldron neatly through the head.

Bill Cody put his arm about little Ann Lee and led her away to the patio into which the early sun was just entering.

**"Berlin Masquerade," a secret service novel by Frederick Painton, appears complete in our next issue.**

## REAL EX- Laughter

*They nearly froze crossing the Alps, but after that the bombing of Turin was easy for the British.*

**T**HE best fun we've had on this station was the first raid on Turin," said the officer who captained one of the aircraft in that raid. "It's a deuce of a long way—fifteen hundred miles—and a deuce of a cold way, with a double crossing of the Alps at eighteen thousand feet; but it was really worth it.

"It was a fine night and we had no difficulty in finding the way. Of course, I can't tell you the routes we take, but I can give you some idea of how we do find our way on these long trips across Europe. So long as visibility is good and your eyesight normal, you soon become accustomed to picking up objects on the ground. Our main visual guides at night are the waterways. Berlin, for instance, is an easily found target on account of the big lakes near by; and the Thames, of course, makes London easy to find.

"But there are many more big waterways on the Continent of Europe than there are at home. Your navigator maps out your course before leaving the ground on the afternoon before the raid. This is his after-tea job. But he keeps on checking the course that you're flying by picking up known landmarks, provided that the weather is good enough for the ground to be seen.

"Apart from broad rivers and well-defined waterways, roads and railways on the Continent are much fewer than they are at home. In the Midlands at home, for instance, there is such a jumble of railway lines that it is very difficult to sort them out unless you know the country very well. But on the Continent there is not a great deal of choice. If you see a main road or a railway, and you have even an approximate idea of the area in which you are flying, you cannot very well mistake it for any other road or railway, because there aren't any.

"On the other hand, you don't get much assistance on the Continent from lights on the ground, as I am sorry to



# PERIENCES\*

## *Over Italy*

*as told to*

RALPH MICHAELIS

say you do in England. The black-out in Europe is very effective; but in England the main roads are often asparkle with light from motorcar headlamps. This is especially true in rainy weather, when the reflected glare of the lamps is shown up on the road. On this Turin raid the first lights that we saw in Europe were those of neutral Switzerland, which we could pick up nearly a hundred miles from the frontier.

"I think that will give you some idea of how we find our way on these long roads. There is one other thing about them that I should like people to understand, and that is that we have to climb over the Alps, some seven hundred odd miles from home, to get into Italy. That, of course, needs very careful navigation. You've got to know exactly where you are when climbing over a mountain range of those dimensions, if you don't want to try conclusions with the side of a mountain. But my navigator knows his stuff, so there was no fear of that.

"As we had to climb up to eighteen thousand feet to get over the mountain, I started to climb steadily sometime before we reached them. To realize what this means, you must know that a long-distance bomber is pretty heavily loaded. I can't tell you exactly how much petrol we carry, but—well, how much motoring do you do in your little car in a year, say ten thousand miles? Well, I carry as much petrol on a trip to Turin as would keep your little car in petrol for three years. If you think of all the times that you stop for petrol in three years, and then try and visualize it in terms of weight and bulk, add to that a very considerable bomb load, the weight of machine-guns and all their ammunition, and that of my crew of five, and you will have some idea of the weight that my two sturdy engines had to pull up to eighteen thousand feet that night over the

\*For details of our Real Experience story contest, see page 3.



Alps. Of course, you will note that a proportion of the petrol has already been used, but even then the effort required is quite considerable.

"The moon was well up when we got to the mountains, and the peaks of the Alps shone like silver. The crossing was an incredibly beautiful sight, which we would have all enjoyed more if we had not been so busy with the job in hand.

"As we climbed into the upper atmosphere, the cold gripped us like a vise. The thermometer was showing twenty-five degrees below zero. Ice was forming on the wings and fuselage, and breaking away with a noise like the crack of ma-

chine-gunfire. In spite of three suits of heavy underclothes, in spite of leather wind-proof wool-lined flying suits and flying boots, with silk socks and silk gloves underneath, we were all frozen stiff. In spite of the heating in our cabin, in spite of the oxygen supply which we were breathing and which generates a certain amount of body heat, our breath froze on our helmets and eyebrows. It was frozen hell.

"But there were compensations; and the greatest compensation was a good laugh. As soon as we got over the Italian frontier, the whole of the Italian anti-aircraft defense went into action—and, oh, boy, did they enjoy themselves.

**T**HE sky was studded for miles with shell-bursts; the ground was lit up like daylight with gun-flashes. But the shells were not merely nowhere near us; they were simply miles away. We could see the guns flashing nearly four miles beneath us, but the guns were still nearer to us than the shells that they were firing at us. They just seemed to be firing straight at the sky without bothering about any target at all. The gunners all seemed to have said to themselves: 'We've got lots of ammunition, some brand-new guns that we've never fired before, and a splendid excuse to have a real good fireworks display.'

"As for the searchlights, they were waltzing madly about the sky like a lot of drunks. They never came anywhere near us, but they did enjoy themselves. There were waltzing searchlights and sweeping searchlights and jumping searchlights, and all apparently working independently and without any reference to their friends.

"This wonderful sky show was greeted with roars of laughter by my crew. The inter-communication telephone rang with it. The great plane almost vibrated with it. From the rear gunner, frozen almost comatose out beyond the tail of the airplane, to the front gunner in the nose, we were all in fits of laughter.

"We had no difficulty in picking out the big industrial town of Turin, and I flew round for a long time so as to make quite sure of the factory buildings which we had been instructed to bomb. The Italian anti-aircraft were still busy shooting holes in the sky, and when other British planes started to follow us in over the frontier, the Italians' panic was quite complete. The searchlights were dancing the Jig and the Chestnut Tree

all over the sky. But in spite of the muscular energy with which their crews threw them about, I doubt whether any of them so much as caught a sight of us or of the other British machines.

"I gave my bomb-aimer three practice runs across the target, and then he let them go with his usual shout of 'Bombs off!'

"As a rule, the pilot does not have much time to see what happens to his bombs, because he is much too busy dodging about the sky, turning, diving, climbing and serving, to put the anti-aircraft gunners off their aim. That night over Turin, however, I was able to give myself the unaccustomed treat of watching our bombs burst.

"Some vivid flashes followed the bursting of the bombs, and then the flames started to lick through the windows of the buildings. Before long a sprinkle of sparks flying skyward with a great belch of black smoke indicated that part of the roof had fallen in. As we climbed up again over the mountains, we could see the red glow of fires for miles in the distance, as other planes arrived, dumped their bombs, and added to the fires.

"Then we had to go through that frozen hell again over the Alps. My second pilot and I were so petrified with cold that it was sometime before we could unstiffen ourselves sufficiently to change seats. Once we were able to fly at a lower level we managed to thaw out a bit, but we couldn't take any chances, as practically the whole journey now was flown over enemy territory.

"There is no doubt that oxygen does help a good deal in keeping one warm, but there are drawbacks to carrying it. Some bomber crews have a prejudice against it and refuse to carry it except when they are obliged to fly very high. The reason for this is that oxygen is highly explosive. If you were to get a piece of shell in the oxygen supply, it would go off like a ton bomb. I know one crew who compromise by carrying a half supply, though they can never give a satisfactory explanation of what the difference would be if they were hit by a ton bomb or only a half-ton bomb in mid-air.

"I was telling you before how we find our way across the Continent. But there are two further items: Firstly, two of my crew and myself spent the first winter of the war sprinkling leaflets over Germany and learning to recognize the country, so that we do know it pretty



well under all sorts of weather conditions. Secondly, you may be pretty certain when coming in from a long-distance bombing raid, that some of our shorter-distance raiders will have started fires somewhere to act as homing beacons.

"Over the North Sea I sent out the usual wireless message asking our home station to give us our position. It came through in a few minutes, and I was glad to find that we were still dead on our course. It had been a very interesting trip, but dreadfully cold."

In civil life that bomber captain is an engineer specializing in household heating apparatus. His navigator is a sergeant who used to be a shop assistant. His bomb-aimer is a young pilot officer fresh from a public school, and his rear gunner is a little fellow who was once a miner.

I have said that the tail gunner was only a little fellow—they have to be, you know, to get inside one of those rear gun turrets, which is about the size of a sub-

stantial beer cask; but I don't want to give you the wrong impression about him. His head looks as if it was hewn out of solid granite, and though short and stocky, he's about as tough as a concrete pill-box.

I asked him if he had had a cold trip out on the tail of the bomber.

"Man," he said, "you don't know what cold is until you've taken a trip over the Alps in that ice-box of mine! The wind howls through the crack where the turret joins the body of the machine and cuts you like a hundred daggers. The snow blows through and freezes on the inside of your windows. It's so cold that your brain freezes."

"I'll never complain of cold on the ground again as long as I live."

Somebody went out of the crews' room where we were talking.

"Hi, shut that blankety door!" shouted the tail gunner. "There's a blankety draft blowing round here!"

# Frozen Hell Over Germany

*Ice on the wings and able opposition made this flight  
hazardous indeed.... As told to—*

RALPH MICHAELIS

I LEARNED my way about Europe last winter—dropping leaflets on Germany from a heavy bomber. The weather was sometimes appalling, with almost unbearable cold; and navigational problems were often perplexing.

I had been iced up, shot up by everything except hand-grenades, set upon by fighters, and lost in fogs over Germany before I dropped a single bomb on that country. I had been to Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Bremen, Hamburg, and the Ruhr. I had become accustomed to ten-hour trips, stiff with cold and cramp; but when the bombing was started, I did know my way about.

I think one of my worst trips was one of the early leaflet trips to Berlin. My crew, consisting of navigator, wireless operator, tail gunner and second pilot, were muffled in three suits of heavy under-

clothes under wool-lined windproof flying kit, and we wore silk gloves under our gauntlets. But in spite of our clothes, and in spite of the heating system in the closed cabin, we were practically frozen stiff by the time we were halfway across the North Sea on the outward journey.

I don't know how we survived the next eight hours. It was frozen hell. Ice formed on the wings and the engine cowlings, and broke off in big chunks, some of which crashed back onto the tail-plane with terrifying crashes. The gunners had constantly to ask permission to fire bursts with their machine-guns in order to prevent them from freezing up.

As soon as we got to Borkum, on the German coast—Windy Corner, we used to call it—the searchlights picked us up, and anti-aircraft opened up on us. It was out of the question to climb up out

## REAL EXPERIENCES

of range, owing to the weight of ice on the wings, and my hands were so numbed with cold that I found it impossible to throw the controls over in evasive action. One shell burst so close under the starboard wing that the concussion nearly turned the airplane over. But we flew through this anti-aircraft fire more or less unharmed.

The thermometer was reading thirty degrees below zero; the hot coffee in our flasks was frozen solid; and every one of us was sick with the cold. I flew on in a kind of cold stupor, and eventually we reached Berlin, and unloaded our cargo of leaflets.

**B**ERLIN and the surrounding country were desolate and covered with snow that shone eerily in the pale moonlight. We did not see any enemy aircraft, nor did we expect to in that dreadful cold. Berlin shone a few searchlights on us; but the anti-aircraft fire was not severe.

We lost height steadily on the way home, weighed down by the great weight of ice on the wings. We were so low when we crossed the German coast again, that they were firing short-ranged "flaming onions" and colored tracer bullets.

When we had managed to fly through that barrage, my rear gunner told me on the inter-communication telephone that the fingers of one of his hands were frozen. He had felt it coming on, on the way out; but had not mentioned it, for fear that I would turn back, as I probably should have if I had known.

I managed to stagger out of my pilot's seat with an effort, and after handing the controls over to my second pilot, went aft with my wireless operator to extricate the rear gunner, who had collapsed.

The rear gunner lives in a turret built out beyond the tail of the airplane. His quarters are hardly bigger than a large barrel, and so low that the height of rear gunners is limited to five feet, eight inches. And if it was cold in the cabin of the airplane, I really don't know what expression you could use to describe the temperature in the rear turret. It was Arctic, and then some.

You can imagine what difficulty two average-sized Englishmen in full flying kit would have in maneuvering a semi-conscious rear gunner out of his turret into the restricted space of the tail end of the airplane in the pitch dark. But we managed it in the end.

Then we broke into the first-aid kit. None of us had any idea what remedy to

apply. All we knew was that the stuff required was in a paste; and as we sorted through the first-aid kit in the dark, we found that there was only one paste, so that must be the correct one. I sent the wireless operator to squeeze himself into the rear turret, lay the frozen tail gunner down in the nose of the plane, and gave him oxygen to warm him up.

Then I sent the second pilot to the wireless operator's place, and took over the controls again myself.

By this time we were out over the North Sea, and so weighed down with ice that we were only a couple of hundred feet above the waves. To make matters worse, we ran into a blizzard; and the snow settled so thickly on the cabin windows that it was impossible to pick up the flashes of the lighthouses on the English coast.

I ordered the wireless operator to ask our home station for a "fix" (a signal that would tell us our position), and having received it, we just managed to skim across the coastal cliffs and get home. But we all had to be lifted out of the airplane. We were literally frozen stiff.

**A**NOTHER time the weather was so thick coming back from Germany that we found ourselves half across the Irish Sea before we asked for a "fix." We had flown right across England without having seen it.

I think I have indicated by this story that tail gunners have to be tough. Exactly how tough they can be may be judged by my experience with another lad, an ex-miner from Lancashire.

We were carrying out a reconnaissance off Heligoland, when we were set upon by three German fighters. One dived on us from the port side, another from the starboard side, and the third from astern. My controls were stiff with frost; but I managed to maneuver into such a position that my tail gunner could get in a burst at him. The German fired at the same time, and hit my gunner in the ankle a split second before he went down.

Not knowing that my gunner had been hit, I turned the plane so that he could get a burst in at another of the fighters. The German fired first, hitting my gunner—in the shoulder this time—and almost immediately went spinning down out of control as my twice-wounded gunner put a burst into him.

The third fighter sheered off; and it was only then that my tail gunner told me casually that he was wounded.



# Bulldog Mickey

*Further reminiscences of  
a great fighter.*

By MICKEY  
WALKER

I RECEIVED an offer to box Bert Colima in California.

Like every American kid in the East, I had always dreamed about seeing the Coast. To go like a champ was better than anything.

Jack Dempsey was out there, too, and I would see him. Fact is, Jack offered to be my trainer for the fight, and one of my most treasured pictures is the one of Jack and me in my corner.

But before I left for the coast, the Everlast Sporting Company gave me a pair of gold-plated boxing gloves to be presented to President Coolidge on my way through Washington. The gloves were inscribed on the back: "*To Pres. Coolidge from Mickey Walker.*"

I was to box an exhibition at a dinner given for the President at the Congressional Country Club. We had a great time at the dinner. But the President couldn't come. And I didn't box.

Before I left Washington, I signed a contract to make a moving picture. I also signed to fight Harry Greb in New York for the middleweight title.

Then came the great meeting with the President.

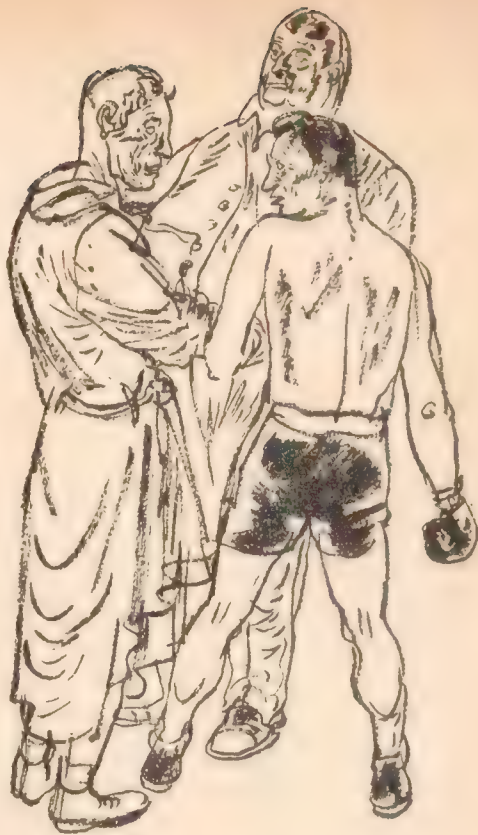
I remember there was a big fuss in the papers about all the trouble the President was having with Congress. I forget what it was about. But he was very nice to us.

I handed him the gloves, but I couldn't speak any of the fine things I had it in my mind I was going to say when the moment came.

"I would be glad if you would take these," I said.

President Coolidge smiled. He had a dry sense of humor. He took the gloves.

"I'll use these on Congress," he says.

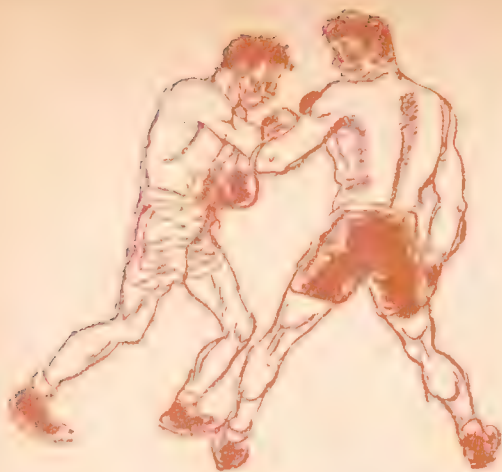


I forgot to say that I was married to a fine girl, Maude Kelly, and most of the newspaper talk about our happiness was true. We had a boy, Mickey, Jr., and a girl, Patricia, two fine names if I say so myself as shouldn't. For some years it was Maude and me, and the good times we had was mostly reported well in the papers. The break-up later is private business. But it was Maude and me met President Coolidge.

The train pulled into Los Angeles, Joe Diégan acting as front man, and some others. Jack Dempsey, Teddy Hayes and a gang of newspaper men met us at the station. Dempsey and Hayes wasn't friendly, as Kearns and Dempsey was splitting as fighter and manager, and Hayes went on Kearns' side. But I didn't know anything about this at the time.

Dempsey was my idol, and I had been molding my style of fighting after his ever since I saw him fight Georges Carpentier in Jersey City. I think Dempsey is the greatest fighter since Sullivan, and then it would be a toss-up who was the best. Dempsey would have had the best of it on account of his speed.

But all in all California was the loneliest place in the world for me—at first, and for some time. I was used to being around with people I knew, and having a little fuss made over me. But



California is so full of celebrities that two out of three people passing on the street are nationally known figures. They couldn't be making a fuss over just anyone. I had to win a fight to find out that they were all swell fellows, and real people like you or me.

Dempsey trained, seconded and managed me for the Colima fight. He gave me one of his cars to use. He had a couple of Rolls-Royces, but his favorite car was a Willys-Knight that was all but falling apart. He was one of the sights of the place, driving that old wreck with his knees coming up to his chin. There wasn't any room in it for anyone else when Jack got in.

Jack was just after opening his gymnasium downtown, and I trained there.

Colima was a big favorite in California, which was his home. Up until our fight, which was the first ten-round fight in California, he had licked all-comers in the legal four-round battle.

A few days before the fight, Colima received a cut over his eye and wanted to call the fight off. Dempsey went over to see his manager, Dutch Myrens, and promised him I wouldn't bother his eye.

I knocked out Colima in the seventh round.

After the first excitement, and I was about to leave the ring, a man come up from the ringside with a familiar face. I had noticed him sitting there, right in the first row in my corner.

"Charley Chaplin!" I says, kind of bashful, fight or no fight.

"I won a bet on you, Mickey," Charley says, and he grins a pretty grin that is much different from when he is wearing his stage mustache.

Charley knows his stuff about boxing, being a good boxer himself. I discovered that a lot of other stars know some boxing, such as Doug Fairbanks, Maurice Chevalier and Clark Gable.

Charley Chaplin was the first man outside the ring to shake hands with me after the fight, and from then on I felt that Hollywood had made me one of their own. Jack Bulger and me had always taken to Broadway, and Hollywood was more of the same sweet stuff (when you're young and handsome), and it made me sad that Jack was not along.

At this time Charley Chaplin was making "The Gold Rush," and when I got around to visit him on his set, he stopped work, and we had a picture taken of me as I was dressed, and him in his acting togs. This is one of my most prized pictures.

At other times I had pictures taken with actors in fighting togs—me and Buster Keaton, me and Chevalier, and so on.

Tom Kennedy, one of the best heavyweights in his day, and now in the pictures, showed us around Hollywood the next day. We visited the studios. Syd Chaplin and I became friendly. Chuck Reisner, who was directing Syd Chaplin, insisted I have my picture taken with a lion, placing Kennedy and me on opposite sides of the lion. This was in a place I thought was a room, but was really a cage. Just as they made ready to take the picture, the lion jumped at me. I ducked, and he went over my head.

"Help!" I yelled.

I made a dash for the door, but instead of a door, there were only iron bars.

I banged into the wall so hard I fell backwards right on top of the lion. Like a streak of lightning I climbed to the top of the iron door, and wouldn't come down until they brought a ladder and put it on the outside for me to escape.

All the time Kennedy stood petting the lion and laughing.

I was beginning to like California very much—without lions, I mean.

MARK KELLY, sports editor of the Los Angeles *Examiner*, and I were having dinner one night when he suggested that I take Jack (Doc) Kearns as my manager.

We got together the next day, Kearns and me. From then on he was my manager, outside of a couple of fights I had under Bill Duffy.

I had signed to fight Lefty Cooper in San Francisco on my own hook, but the Doc took over and installed Teddy Hayes as my trainer. Teddy was my trainer from that time until after the Schmeling fight. This was to be my first fight under the Doc.



Cooper was a tough guy, a deadly puncher. If the Doc hadn't been on the job, I don't know what would of come out of it, because Hollywood was beginning to catch up with me. Cooper was knocking them all dead, and I was in no shape at all to fight, though I was having the time of my life.

Here I was riding around the stars and the studios in my new mobile with all the trimmings, drinking tea with my little finger crooked. And now I am reminded that I am nothing but a vulgar member of the people who wear padded gloves in the roped arena. I was reminded, and how.

"Well, Mick," the Doc says, "you gotta snap out of it. Report to me in the morning ready for work."

"Don't see how I can," I says. "I have an engagement with Charley Chaplin at eleven-thirty."

"Eleven-thirty!" the Doc says. "O. K., you can keep your engagement, but you'll run ten miles on the road first. Think of how good you'll feel, after a shower. And listen, no more social business unless I'm in on it."

"Oh, cuttin' in, Doc?" I says, but then I was sorry I said it.

"Yeah," says the Doc, "and for that crack I'll wake you up an hour earlier."

It was no time at all I forgot the heavy social duties around the movie capital. Fact is, Doc and Teddy kept me so busy I couldn't see straight. As always, I hated training. Sweat and blood, work and more work, until the time of the fight.

The night of the fight I was in pretty fair shape. It lasted one round—and what a round!

Lefty Cooper landed one in the belly that opened my mouth wide like a fish trying to get some air. It was a long left swing. I can still remember that punch. I couldn't move my feet.

A few seconds of boxing, and I connected with a left hook that sent him down for the count of ten. It was to the chin, the "button." Kind of a left-handed fight.

I had to get back to New York to fight Greb.

Harry Greb in his class was one of the greatest—on a par with Dempsey, for a lightweight.

But I was sure I could take him, so I didn't pay so much attention to the purse, twenty-five grand, offered by the promoter, Herman Fugazy.

"Twenty-five thousand?" Doc says. "Fugazy is taking you for a ride because you're a kid. You're the welterweight

champ; you were scheduled to take Benny Leonard, and now Fugazy's going after a gate that'll knock them cold—including Mickey Walker."

I explained my best.

"Nope," Doc says. "I'm calling the fight off."

Doc invests a young mint in phone-calls, but I'm sewed up on the dotted line, and Fugazy won't rip a stitch.

Another thing was that the N. Y. Boxing Commission had it in for Doc, and wouldn't let him into the Polo Grounds.

If Doc had been in my corner instead of listening to the fight over the radio, it might have been a different fight. But I didn't know so much then. To this day Doc thinks Fugazy took advantage of me and he would never let me box for him after that.

THERE was a great set of fights on the same card that night. Dave Shade kayoed Jimmy Slattery, and Harry Wills kayoed Charlie Winant. Not knowing that all the fights were ending in knock-outs, Hayes and I was wandering around taking our sweet time while the thousands of fight-fans yelled and booed for Greb and Walker.

We sneaked in through a back gate where we had to cross the baseball outfield. The crowd in the bleachers saw us. It began to rain soda-pop bottles.

Me, I thinks they are giving me a hand. I was busy taking bows when Hayes caught me up and started us at a trot.

"They are heaving those bottles at us," Hayes said.

What a fight that night!

It was a fifteen-round fight, with Ed Purdy refereeing.

At fight time Greb had a considerable weight advantage over me.

We were called to the center of the ring and given our instructions as to the rules of how we should fight—no punching low, no holding, etc.

Then the bell.

In the very first round Ed Purdy slipped to one knee and broke his kneecap, winding up on the floor. It was a funny place for a referee to be. Greb and I looked at Purdy and then went right on fighting.

Purdy stayed in as referee, but a new referee should have replaced him, as Purdy couldn't move when he was on his feet. That let Greb do all his fighting in close and wrestled me around. As he was much bigger and stronger, he tired me toward the end.



When the second round was almost over, we both nearly hit the floor. Greb hit me on the chin and spun me around. My head was dizzy and seeing the floor coming up, I put out my hand, holding me from being on the floor. The crowd thought it was a slip.

My head cleared quickly, and I saw Greb waiting to tear after me. I swung from that position, and hit Greb's chin.

I saw his legs buckle and a glassy look in his eyes. Greb fell up against the rope, I after him with dynamite punches. Then the bell rang.

It was a fast, exciting fight all the way through, with the referee never able to come near us. Hayes was in my corner, instructing. I could hear his voice even with a million others screeching.

"Take it easy, Mick," I heard; "take it easy, easy, easy—save it for the finish."

It was pretty even right up to the thirteenth. And Greb was tiring.

When Greb tired, he knew a lot of tricks that would make up for his speed, and he would turn them on. As we came out for the fourteenth, Greb backed me up against the ropes. . . .

He let a straight right-hand punch go with all his weight behind it. I saw the punch coming, but I had my left shoulder raised, with my chin behind it, and I thought my shoulder would block it. It hit me right on the button.

**I** WAS out on my feet, but I didn't go down. I staggered like a drunk, with Greb throwing punches at me from all angles. I was on the ropes with my hands hanging by my side, a sorry mess.

The bell again, but I didn't hear it. Hayes got in the ring and gave me the fireman's lift. He spent the minute's rest with smelling-salts and a bucket of water.

My head cleared a little.

When the bell rang for the final and fifteenth round, and I went into the center of the ring to shake hands, my left eye was completely closed, and Greb looked like a midget to me. I had to find his hand in the air without letting him know I was almost blind.

We shook hands and started to fight.

I made up my mind that if I was going down, it was going to be the fightingest going down. I just let everything go I had.

I kept swinging my fists going around like the governor on a dynamo. And in that way I nailed Greb on the chin, and I put him in the same condition I was in the round previous.

But I couldn't make him out plainly, and I couldn't find him to rain punches on if I knew enough for that. The final bell found us wandering around like two orphans in a London fog.

Purdy raised Greb's hand.

The decision was rightly his on account of the fourteenth round. But—

**T**HAT night Greb appeared at Billy La Hiff's, where I was hearing the bad news how Doc Kearns had put ten grand on my winning after he heard the report of the thirteenth round over the radio.

Greb was there when I came in. After a while he came over.

"Mickey," Greb says, "come over and have a bottle of ale on me."

I says okay.

I intended to stay at Greb's table only a few minutes. But we got talking. It's funny but we seemed to like to talk to each other that way, after we fought one of the bitterest of boxfights earlier in the night.

Around 4 A.M. one of the waiters switched off the lights. We looked around—we were the only ones in the place.

"Let's go over to the Silver Slipper, Harry," I said.

"Let's go, Mickey," Greb says.

Walking across 48th Street to Broadway, I said:

"Harry, old boy," I said, "you know what? I might have licked you tonight if—"

Greb stopped short, insulted.

"You little Irish baboon," Greb says, "I can lick you any time of the day or night."

"Shut up," I said.

He starts to take off his coat.

Just then the cop on the beat came running up.

I knew him, but he didn't recognize me.

"Break it up, break it up," the old cop said.

"Look," Greb says. "I'm Harry Greb and that's Mickey Walker. Don't you know the fight fans paid a hundred grand to see us fight?"

"Now, you don't say so," the cop says. "Well, let me introduce myself. I'm Jack Dempsey. Now beat it, git along, one up the street, one down."

"Forget it, Officer," I said.

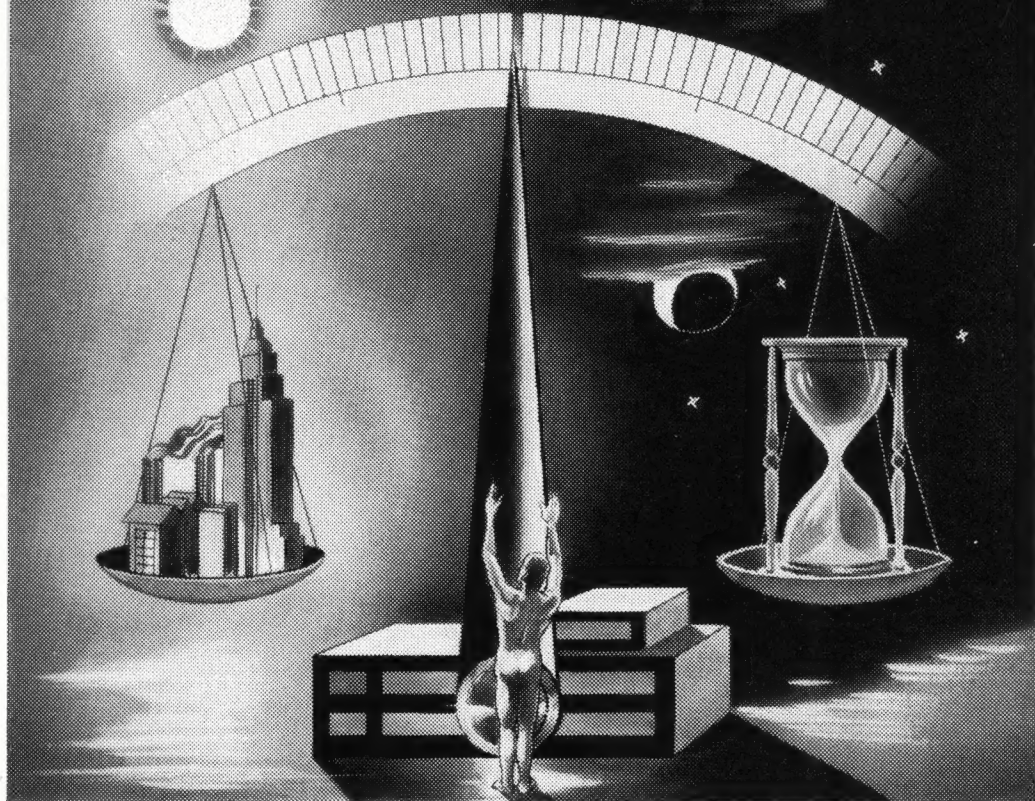
"Forget it, nothing," this bloke says. "You want me to run you in? Now go home like good little boys."

"Jack, here, is right, Harry," I says. "See you in church."

I walked up the street.



# FOURTH DIMENSION



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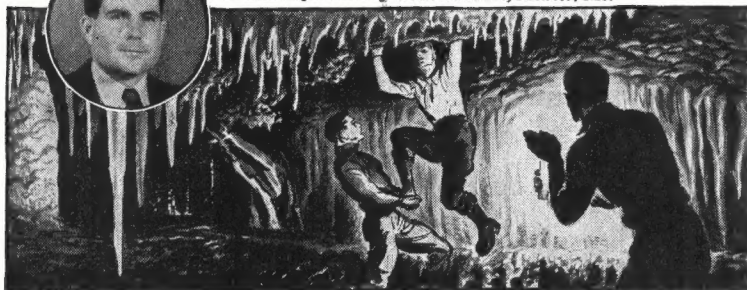
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